Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: Figuring Sisterhood

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Virginia Woolf's writing must be understood as enacting her sororal relationship with her sister Vanessa Bell. The argument is grounded in theorisations of kinship that regard relationships as actively performed and constructed and therefore allow interpretations of creative work as a site of 'doing sisters', or sistering. A focus on siblings provides a lateral alternative to conventional figurations of familial and social life, which tend to follow Oedipal models. Siblings' relationships comprise the fabrication, management and negotiation of their inherent sameness as well their difference within that sameness. I argue that Woolf's writing, which was often explicitly inspired by her relationship with Vanessa and her views on Vanessa's character, participates in such a sistering process. By reading Woolf's writing alongside this theory and auto/biographical material, this thesis explores various ways of textual sistering. Beginning with her earliest fictional and biographical compositions, Virginia constructed her relationship with Vanessa by attempting to portray her and by creating and repeating a version of the familial history they shared. Virginia's first two novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, besides featuring characters modelled on Vanessa, continue to enact and traverse a range of sororal feelings, which substantiate the difficulties of handling and representing the difference or otherness of the sister. My reading of *Flush* completes the thesis by proposing that, as a significant rewriting of the sisters' herstory, it revisions kinship as accepting of otherness. Overall, this study contributes to understandings of Virginia and Vanessa's complex bond, and to theorisations of art's ability to produce personal intimacy and distance.

Acknowledgements

This work came into being under the wing of the English Department at Queen Mary University of London. The department has been my intellectual home since 2011 and I am lastingly grateful to each teacher, mentor, and colleague who has guided me through the years. My foremost thanks are to my supervisors, Professor Peggy Reynolds, whose faith in me and this project never wavered, and to Professor Scott McCracken, whose discerning feedback has been invaluable.

Academics near and far have contributed to my work in numerous ways. I am thankful to Clara Jones, Diana Swanson, Denis Flannery, Saskia McCracken, and Jenny Lelkes for sharing their work with me, and to Vicki Tromanhauser and Sam McBean for reading suggestions, and to Ruth Webb for free run of her library. Co-panelists at conferences have provided stimulating discussions and moments of insight. Special thanks to Hana Leaper who brought me to the *Famous Women Dinner Service* and has shown heart-warming interest in my work. In an editorial capacity, Derek Ryan and Peter Adkins have provided useful feedback to one version of this research. Peter, Michael Whitworth, Mimi Lu, Ellie Mitchell, Rachel Crossland, and Bryony Randall were kind to me in a post-pandemic world.

I have also benefited from the treasures, patience and expertise of librarians and archivists at the Berg Collection of New York Public Library, The Keep at the University of Sussex, the British Library, and the University of Exeter library.

I believe that scholarly pursuits and other fun are best shared and therefore want to acknowledge my many friends who have also been the most inspiring and admirable academics in my life: Jade, Melissa, Laura, Kester, Lauren, Eret, and Beci.

Other friends who have made a difference in these four years include Simon, CJ, Seidi, Mira, Mikko, Tom, Fran, and Anna. Karo and Tom—thank you for the beds and vegan cupcakes.

Most fundamentally, a study of sisters is of course all about family. My grandparents Ingmar and Irma, never having doubted me, have been instrumental in making everything I have ever done possible. My uncle Peter has been an early inspiration. Äiti, thank you for being the most undemanding mother and for teaching me that the world is open and beautiful. Pepi is in Chapter 4. Sanna, I love you, and you are naturally inscribed on every page of what follows. Iina, where did you go? Taru, you have sistered me with such complete goodness that you risk turning me into an essentialist. And finally and completely inadequately, thank you, James, whose love composes my everyday with such steadfastness that I may have to spend a lifetime looking for a phrase to stand beside your name.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

INTRODUCTION: VIRGINIA, VANESSA, AND WRITING AS SISTERING

In May 1927, after sending two copies of her new novel *To the Lighthouse* to her sister Vanessa Bell in Cassis, Virginia Woolf agonised over not receiving her sister's impressions soon enough. Whatever happened – there seems to have been a delay in the post – Vanessa read the book in three days – 'a record I should think' – and wrote Virginia a lengthy letter on the 11th.[1] The novel, she declared, had left her 'eating dust at your feet'.[2] She was 'more incapable than any one else in the world of making an aesthetic judgement on it', but was convinced by the novel's aesthetic shape, 'which must be enormously strong to make any impression on me at all beside the other feelings which you roused in me—I suppose I'm the only person in the world who can have those feelings, at any rate to such an extent.' Vanessa was utterly convinced of the veracity of their parents portrayed as Mr and Mrs Ramsay. Virginia's 'portrait of mother' was 'more like to me than anything I could ever have conceived of as possible', so much that '[i]t is almost painful to have her so raised from the dead.' Going on '[y]ou have made me', Vanessa crossed out 'me' and, in an attempt to offer a more impersonal account, wrote instead 'one feel the extraordinary beauty of her character'. These 'shattering' portraits so convinced the other daughter of Julia and Leslie Stephen, that, 'as far as portrait painting goes', she pronounced her sister 'a supreme artist'. After having very stirringly described her emotions, she characteristically declared 'But I am very bad at describing my feelings.' She could, however, trust that 'you'll understand.'

For Virginia, Vanessa's praise meant that she 'was in such a happy state, no tea kettle, no cat, not all the contented and happy creatures in the whole world, were a match for [her].'[3] She had received approval from the reader who mattered most, and her sister's total endorsement of Mrs Ramsay sent her into 'a terrible state of pleasure.'[4] Virginia's fears that she might have 'made up a sham—an ideal' were dissipated.[5] As an afterthought to her characterisation of their mother, she added, 'Probably there is a great deal of you in Mrs Ramsay; though, in fact, I think you and mother are very different in my mind.'[6] This statement not only admits a blurring of autobiographical inspirations in Mrs Ramsay, but

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[1] New York, New York Public Library [NYPL], Berg Collection, Virginia Woolf collection of papers, 1882-1984 bulk (1912-1940), Vanessa Bell to Virginia Woolf, 19th May 1927.
Note: for clarity, I will be abbreviating the sisters as 'VB' and 'VW' even when referring to letters written before their marriages.

[2] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 11th May 1927. Further references in this paragraph are to this letter.

[3] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994), III, p.383.

[4] *Letters*, III, p.383.

[5] *Letters*, III, p.383.

[6] *Letters*, III, p.383.

also claims that Virginia reserved a category that was different from their mother for Vanessa, her sister. The initial interest of this thesis is in that category of the sister and the characters that populated, reflected and influenced it.

This thesis argues that Virginia Woolf's writing must be understood as a key component in her kinship and sororal relationship with Vanessa Bell, and vice versa. Writing can be understood as an act of self-fashioning, and since the self is inevitably shaped in relation to others, writing should be taken to mean the verbal construction of self *and* others. Kinship constitutes social and familial ties that are the basis for a similarly active fashioning of self, others and material organisation of life. My contention is that Virginia's writing actively 'sisters' Vanessa: since I view sister relationships, like all kinship, as something that is done, it is suitable to talk about 'sistering', or the actions that constitute being sisters. Virginia's writerly sistering of Vanessa involves using her as a point of comparison in her own identity formation, and reflection on and fabrication of versions of Vanessa's identity that interact with the real Vanessa. Furthermore, it produces representations of their shared heritage and herstory, enacts and explores her sororal feelings towards Vanessa, and pivots her evolving ideas of kinship on her characterisations of Vanessa and their sororal relationship. Most centrally, sistering, also in its textual form, comprises the construction, management and negotiation of the sisters' sameness and difference.

Many versions of Vanessa can be traced all over Virginia's oeuvre, but in the spirit of adventure, I offer case studies of five texts less studied than her modernist novels – 'Phyllis and Rosamond', 'Reminiscences', *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day*, and *Flush* – proposing readings of these as examples of written sistering practice. My argument is grounded in theorisations of kinship and sisterliness, and, on a broader level, emphasises the conventionally-understated significance of lateral or horizontal – as opposed to vertical – kin relations. By reading autobiographical fiction as a kinship practice, I hope to contribute to an understanding of women's homosocial experiences and practices. My reading of Virginia and Vanessa's sororal relationship is framed by an idea of siblinghood's inherent negotiation of sameness and difference – and difference within sameness – and I trust this framing to complicate existing notions about Virginia's literary creativity focused on and inspired by her sister. In particular, this thesis wants to trouble the sister relationship and its representations in Virginia's writing and consider questions about how Virginia writes and pictures Vanessa's character, their bond and lived experiences: if we approach Virginia's characterisations of Vanessa critically, what kind of sister – the author, and the authored – do we discover? How did Virginia try to express the specificity of their sororal bond? How

is the relationship reflected on and influenced by the writing? How can we describe Virginia's vision of kinship and intersections of sameness and difference in her most long-term intimate relationship?

THEORISING SISTERS: SIBLINGS

This study is interested in Virginia and Vanessa as sisters, and therefore draws from theories of kinship. Like all patriarchal discourses, the study of kinship – which refers to a 'system of social organization based on real or putative family ties' – was set up to elide what is particular about sisters' relations: in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969), Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed the first kinship categories were created by 'men exchanging their sisters', or 'wife givers' and 'wife takers'.[7] Gayle Rubin (1975) and other feminists critiqued such androcentric presumptions, and David Schneider questioned the assumption 'blood is thicker than water' that seemed to underlie Western conceptualisations of kinship in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984).[8] By proposing that defining kinship through '"blood"' and '"birth"' omitted the importance of 'performance, forms of doing, various codes of conduct, different roles', he made way for a new understanding of kinship as an act or practice.[9] Another vital revision of the study of kinship was made by Kath Weston's *Families We Choose* (1991), which maintained that sustaining kin ties requires work, emphasised that kin positions are subject to negotiation, and demonstrated that 'choice can become a key element of how kinship is constructed.'[10] These reconsiderations have inspired new directions in contemporary kinship studies, and they inform my approach by highlighting

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[7] Janet Carsten, 'Kinship', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 5 April 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/kinship/Alliance-theory#ref278968> [accessed 7.3.2020]. See also the index entry 'sister-exchange' in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

[8] Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp.33—65.
Luce Irigaray's 'Women on the Market' (1978) argues that in a masculine social system in which women are used and exchanged by men, women have no access to language and are disappropriated from their relations with themselves and other women (*This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985], pp.170—191).
Carol Stack's *All Our Kin* (1974) explored kinship ties that did not rely on marriage by examining 'how kinship functions well through a network of women, some related through biological ties, and some not' (Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', *d–i–f–f–e–r–e–n–c–e–s: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13.1 [2002], p.15).

[9] David Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), p.72.

[10] Ellen Lewin, 'Lesbian and Gay Kinship: Kath Weston's *Families We Choose* and Contemporary Anthropology', *Signs*, 4 (1993), p.976.

women's kin relations and by permitting me to think of kinship as something that is both 'done' and 'chosen', and hence of the Stephen sisters as its active performers.[11]

Schneider's re-conceptualisation of kinship as doing instead of being has had notable purchase in queer kinship theory. Elizabeth Freeman's 'Queer Belongings' thinks through a number of ways to envision kinship 'as a practice' that is 'resolutely corporeal'.[12] Freeman sees kinship as 'a social and not a biological fact' and attests that it can be 'produced or constructed'; she offers phrases like 'kinetic kinship' and 'practical kinship' as possible terms to understand kinship as a practice that requires 'continuous realization and maintenance to exist at all.'[13] If we consider kinship as a 'code of conduct', 'all kinship may, indeed, be a matter of poses, gestures, performance', as Freeman writes; indeed ritualised and gestural activities such as 'games, contests, and riddles' produce a feeling of kinship in their participants.[14] She observes both repetition and non-reproductive futurity in her conclusive thoughts on kinship as '"the field of relationships *constantly* reused and thus reactivated for future use."'[15] Such an understanding of kinship as an active practice rather than just a static state of biological relatedness runs through my reading of Virginia's work as producing, constructing and maintaining her kinship with Vanessa.

If traditional anthropology has been rather blind to sibling relationships as worthy of study, so has psychoanalysis. Freud's theory of the family was centred on the so-called Oedipal triad – father, mother, son/child – and inspired the discipline's reliance on the vertical parent-child-axis.[16] Contemporary psychoanalysts have proposed correctives to the Oedipal over-reliance by suggesting alternative origin myths to Freud's Oedipus, re-reading some of his cases from an angle interested in siblings, and by exploring and demonstrating

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[11] *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship* (ed. Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, 2001) offers a comprehensive look at the revised tendencies of kinship studies. In the collection, 'agency, "choice", and negotiation become foci of analysis'; helpfully, the editors acknowledge that 'kinship also speaks to the possibilities for equality, hierarchy, and violence' (Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, 'New Directions in Kinship Study: A Core Concept Revisited', *Current Anthropology*, 2 [2000], pp.276—7.).

[12] Elizabeth Freeman, 'Chapter 15: Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory', in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies*, ed. by George Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp.295—314 (298).

[13] Freeman, p.299, 298, 305.

[14] Freeman, p.305, 307, 309.

[15] Pierre Bourdieu quoted in Freeman, p.308.

[16] In Freud's 'Family Romances', siblings figure as the child's competitors for the parent's love; Freud also tumbles upon the possibility of (heterosexual) sibling incest, but quickly reassures the reader and himself that it is not necessary 'to turn away in horror from this depravity of the childish heart', because the child's fantasies 'preserve, under a slight disguise, the child's original affection for his parents' (p.239).
As David Eng notes, Rubin's 'Traffic in Women', '[s]titch[es] together Oedipal and anthropological accounts of kinship,' demonstrating that "[t]he precision of the fit between Freud and Lévi-Strauss is striking." (*The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010], p.87); Rubin, p.57.

the importance of sibling relations in their therapeutic and clinical work.[17] The most influential intervention has been Juliet Mitchell's *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (2003), which argues for revolutionising the picture of social and psychological organisation by bringing siblings into it. Mitchell asks, 'Why have we not considered that lateral relations in love and sexuality or in hate and war have needed a theoretical paradigm with which we might analyse, consider and seek to influence them?', and declares the need for 'a paradigm shift that challenges the unique importance of understanding through vertical paradigms', to which 'an observation of the importance of siblings, and all the lateral relations that take their cue from them' will lead.[18] Sex and violence within the sibling relationship are integral to Mitchell's theory: these drives are importantly 'not the same as [those] directed at parents'; 'the prohibition on them is weaker' and, most vitally, '[v]iolence and sexuality between siblings are much closer together in their construction and what matters is that both acts and emotions of sex and of murderousness are *for the same person*'.[19] Mitchell daringly demonstrates that '"where the wild things are" for humans is here within the family.'[20] Furthermore, *Siblings* presents itself as conducive to literary application: Mitchell, like Freud, draws her psychological models from Sophocles, especially *Antigone*, and, finding psychoanalytical theory of siblings lacking, turns to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* to push the limits of possible readings of sibling incest.

Mitchell's theorising on sameness and difference within the sibling relationship is fundamental to this thesis. Her laterally-oriented explication of the multitude of psychological phenomena that are integral to siblings—'splitting of the ego and object, identification and projection, and the simultaneous reversal of love and hate, [...] the transformation of narcissism into object-love and murderousness into an objective hatred of what is wrong or evil'—evinces that these, and the elementary juxtaposition of the self and the other, 'are the building blocks of a lateral not vertical paradigm.'[21] One of the useful terms Mitchell introduces is the law of the mother. Mitchell argues that hitherto

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[17] See for example Prophecy Coles, 'Sibling Incest', in *Siblings in Development: A Psychoanalytic View*, ed. by Vivienne Lewin and Belinda Sharp (London: Karnac Books, 2009), pp.101—114. Coles reassesses Freud's Wolfman and argues that '[o]ne way of finding a place for sibling relationships in the structure of the internal world is to go back to the myth of Narcissus, but not the version that Freud favoured'—but to Pausanias' version in which Narcissus has a twin sister (p.108). Another example of Freud re-read is found in Mitchell's assessment of Dora in *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effects of Sibling Relationships on the Human Condition* (2000), chapter 3.
Besides Lewin and Sharp's *Siblings in Development*, interesting recent developments are covered in *Sibling Relationships* (ed. Coles, 2006), and in Joyce Edward's *The Sibling Relationship: A Force for Growth and Conflict* (2011).

[18] Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p.1, 3.

[19] Mitchell, pp.34—5.

[20] Mitchell, p.47.

[21] Mitchell, p.225.

psychoanalysis has depended on law-giving fathers, and her intervention is to regard the mother as a subject, too, who, like the father and concurrently with him, is law-giving. Whereas the law of the father is solely vertical, the mother's injunction adjudicates between the siblings, recognising them as equally valid and individual.[22] Mitchell writes that the law of the mother 'introduces seriality laterally among her children'.[23] The law – which 'allow[s] space for one who is the same and different' – enables siblings' survival from murderous rivalries into sibling and peer love by differentiating the siblings.[24] The differentiation happens through an internalisation of seriality – another important concept – that Mitchell explains addresses the sameness of the siblings' positions, for example with regard to their parent(s), but that 'one is also different: there is room for two, three, four or more.'[25] A series is the primary concept in imagining lateral origin myths: unlike the Oedipus complex, which Mitchell sees as 'a metaphor for a nexus of relationships', '[l]ateral relations such as Remus and Romulus, Cain and Abel, the twins who feature in various creations myths, form not a nexus but a series.'[26] Like other theorists of siblinghood, Mitchell looks to *Antigone* as an alternative to *Oedipus Rex*, finding there a sister 'insisting that one must acknowledge two brothers, not just one'; for Antigone, in a variation of the law of the mother, siblings are 'different but equal'.[27] Finally, although the mother is the restrictor of the child's hatred for her sibling – 'I hate you, you are not me' – and the first enforcer of seriality, Mitchell confirms that 'the lateral relationship itself instigates its own processes of managing sameness through constructing difference'—providing yet another way to think about active processing, managing and construction of sameness and difference within the siblingship.[28]

The most complete consideration of the question 'What would happen if psychoanalysis' – or anthropology, philosophy, or indeed literature – 'were to have taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?' has been provided by Judith Butler.[29] Her *Antigone's Claim* (2000) brings together many aspects of kinship I have gestured toward, such as her Schneiderian identification of kinship as 'what [Antigone]

[22] Mitchell sees the law of the mother operating 'both vertically between herself and her children and laterally to differentiate her children one from each other', and attests that this operation of the law is 'the crucial first vertical relation for siblings' (p.52, 11). As a study on a siblingship, this thesis is interested in the law's lateral influence and enactment.
[23] Mitchell, p. 52.
[24] Mitchell, p.52.
[25] Mitchell, p.53. She explains 'the primary identification with the peer group' as 'positive and subject not to negation but to differentiation', which enables incorporating diversity in peer identification (p.14).
[26] Mitchell, p.190.
[27] Mitchell, p.128.
[28] Mitchell, p.53.
[29] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Love and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p.57.

repeats through her action', 'a set of practices'.[30] Like Mitchell, Butler uses literature – *Antigone* – as a source and site for theorising kinship, attesting that as the conclusion to the Oedipal drama, Antigone and the deformity, displacement and alterations of kinship she represents 'demand a rearticulation of the structuralist presupposition of psychoanalysis' since demonstrating that, as in nature, 'there is no ultimate basis for normative heterosexual monogamous family structure' in language.[31] Butler's understanding of the intimate alliances of kinship being 'both enduring *and* breakable' is an important contribution to theorising kinship and, importantly for me, encourages a complication of Virginia and Vanessa's often-idealised sisterhood.[32] Moreover, I find Butler's acknowledgement of the radical singularity of Antigone's siblingship with her brother relevant; it is this singularity which is untranslatable into public representation and which Butler sees as existing beyond cultural intelligibility so that something of this kinship remains unspeakable. Butler's conclusion positions Antigone as 'occup[ying] the language that can never belong to her' – the language of the human, of Creon, of those who have the right to act in the public sphere – and so 'upset[ting] the vocabulary of kinship'.[33] For my purposes, Butler's speculation about the 'new field of the human' that Antigone stands for is very productive: when 'kinship founders on its own founding laws', and if we take 'the play of siblings' as the departure-point for a new, lateral figuration of kinship, what kind of vocabulary is employed to depict kin relations and what kind of consequences does this vocabulary, as repeated action, have on that relationship?[34]

Useful as both Mitchell's and Butler's theories of siblinghood are, neither of them looks directly at the figure of the sister whose sibling is another sister. Mitchell's *Siblings*, for example, imagines throughout the pair of siblings as a brother and a sister; indeed, sisters blend with mothers and wives, but do not appear as sisters amongst themselves.[35] Therefore this thesis both points out this critical omission and develops these theories of

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[30] Butler (2000), p.58.

[31] Butler (2000), p.19, 72—3.
One important branch of Butler's analysis addresses legitimacy of love: which social arrangements, or forms of kinship, permit explicit grieving? Her interest in precariously liveable and grievable lives and loves has been further explored in later work, such as 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?' (2002) or *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009) Here, I am primarily indebted to her reflections about the intelligibility of kinship and the possibility of rearticulating its terms. Emily Dalgarno brings together Woolf's *Three Guineas* and its search for "new words", grieving a sibling (in this case, a brother), and the *Antigone* in her elegant *Virginia Woolf and the Migrations of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.57.

[32] Butler (2000), p.72. My emphasis.
In her lecture 'Kinship Trouble in *The Bacchae*', given 8 February 2017 at UCL, Butler elaborated her claim that kinship always involves the possibility of rupture, picturing this possibility as defining kinship. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixwrw0PMC8I> [accessed 12.8.2019].

[33] Butler (2000), p.82.

[34] Butler (2000), p.82, Mitchell, p.31.

[35] See Mitchell's index entry 'sisters', p.251.

siblinghood by considering the specific concept of sisters and the practice of sisterhood. As we will see, much of Mitchell's theorisation of siblings applies to the subcategory of sisters, but certain phenomena are heightened in their case, such as the strength of the sameness sustained and suffered, cultural and social invisibility, and the want of appropriate vocabulary, because sisters are, of course, women.

THEORISING SISTERS: WOMEN-AMONG-THEMSELVES

In addition to highlighting lateral kinship, this thesis is obviously invested in women's relationships. Of course, such a focus goes back to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), where the narrator comes upon a fictional novel in which 'Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature.'[36] The narrator notes that 'absurdly' so far in literature, 'Cleopatra's only feeling about Octavia is one of jealousy', continuing:

> But how interesting it would have been if the relationship between the two women had been more complicated. All these relationships between women [...] are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. [...] They are confidantes, of course, in Racine and the Greek tragedies. They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were [...] not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that (62)[37]

Woolf makes it clear that woman's relationships to men are just a fraction of her life; she refers to women's roles as each other's confidantes and rivals, emphasising that there is room for complication. What else happens when women are among themselves? *A Room of One's Own* was born in the context of 'a woman speaking to women', to borrow Jane Goldman's phrase, and its protagonist is characterised by lateral seriality—the woman we follow may be called 'Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael' or any such name (4).[38] Without a doubt one of Woolf's artistic aims was to 'catch those unrecorded gestures, those

[36] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. by Anna Snaith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.1—86 (62). Further references will appear in the body text.
[37] Interestingly, of woman's possible familial roles in relation to men 'sister' is absent—but, at this point, we have already witnessed the fate of Shakespeare's sister.
[38] Jane Goldman, 'The feminist criticism of Virginia Woolf', in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.66—84 (71).

unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling, when women are alone' (64).

A vast tradition of French feminism has been inspired by this possibility of women's language and/or writing, hoping to unearth the 'words that are hardly syllabled yet', but for my current purposes, I will be drawing from Luce Irigaray (64).[39] Her work shares my interest in the dialogic nature of language between women, and Diana Wallace has previously demonstrated its fruitful application in analyses of literary sister relationships.[40] Wallace, too, considers 'dialogue' 'a crucial concept' and sees '[c]onversation between women' as 'anticipating Irigaray's emphasis on "women speaking together"', observing that '[t]his is not necessarily an ideal—dialogue can be rivalrous as well as friendly and supportive.'[41] Thinking about the relationship between a mother and a daughter, Irigaray asks 'How can the relationship between these two women be articulated?' and declares articulating this women's bond 'is one place where the need for another "syntax," another "grammar" of culture is crucial.'[42] Although Irigaray does not consider sisters in particular, I would suggest that sisters, being outsiders to the conventional Oedipal hierarchies of the family due to their laterality and gender, are in an even direr need of woman's language and, furthermore, may offer a possible space for that '"elsewhere"' where Irigaray argues the alternative mode of exchange to the patriarchal logic could emerge.[43]

Irigaray sees the potential for discovering both a language and 'a form of "social existence" other than the one that has always been imposed upon them' in women's joining

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[39] For a quick overview of Woolf and French feminists, see Lisa Coleman, 'Woolf and Feminist Theory: Woolf's Feminism Comes in Waves', in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp.79—91.
Elsa Högberg's *Virginia Woolf and the Ethics of Intimacy* (forthcoming 2020), also applying theory from Irigaray and Butler, will presumably contribute to our understanding of Woolf's intimate relationships.

[40] Among research on literary sisterhoods—biographical or fictional—Wallace has by far been the most useful, due to her theoretical grounding in Irigaray and Bakhtin. Mary Jean Corbett's *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (2008) is an informative, historical look at incest, but has little to say about sisters per se. Readers of Austen—which included the Stephen sisters—should consult Glenda Hudson's *Sibling Love and Incest in Jane Austen* (1999) and trace the furore that followed Terry Castle's review of Austen's letters in *The London Review of Books*, which asked 'Was Jane Austen Gay?' (and involved with her sister Cassandra). Masako Hirai's *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in* Antigone, Middle March, Howards End, *and* Women in Love (1998) suffers from a tendency to prioritise heterosexual relationships before sororal ones. Toni McNaron's *Sister Bond* (1985) is a little utopian but offers several short accounts of literary sisters and occasionally thoughtfully sees sisterhood as 'a capacity not a destiny. It must be chosen, exercised by acts of will.' (Olga Broumas quoted in Adalaide Morris, 'Two Sisters Have I: Emily Dickinson's Vinnie and Susan', in *The Sister Bond: A Feminist View of a Timeless Connection*, ed. by Toni McNaron [New York: Pergamon Press, 1985], p.83). *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature* (ed. JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward, 1993) offers studies of fictional sisters. Together these studies provide an impression of the kinds of stereotypes that subsist in research on sisters, and have given me ideas about what to undermine.

[41] Diana Wallace, *Sisters and Rivals in British Women's Fiction, 1914—39* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.9.

[42] Luce Irigaray, 'Questions', in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, pp.119—169 (143). Irigaray tried to 'put that syntax into play in *Speculum [of the Other Woman]*', discovering 'that a single gesture obliged me to go back through the realm of the masculine imaginary' ('Questions', p.135).

[43] Irigaray, 'Questions', p.158.

together '"among themselves."'[44] Her 'When Our Lips Speak Together' envisages expressions beyond the juxtaposition of the self and other, speculating about speaking outside 'their compartments, their schemas, their distinctions and oppositions: virginal/deflowered, pure/impure, innocent/experienced', aligning women with both horizontality – 'we are at home on the flatlands' – and multiplicity—'we have so many dimensions.'[45] The language whose invention Irigaray calls for imagines women not in male-centred rivalries and oppositions, but in a lateral, dialogic, and multifarious relationship with one another. One of her final, climactic depictions of women-among-themselves calls to mind Mitchell's law of the mother functioning among siblings and allowing space 'for one who is the same and different': 'We live by twos beyond all mirages, images, and mirrors. Between us, one is not the "real" and the other her imitation; one is not the original and the other her copy.'[46] Vitally, in this being among women, 'we relate to one another without simulacrum. Our resemblance does without semblances.'[47] In the dialogue that Irigaray envisions beyond the patriarchal order, women speak to each other, and, it seems, the women's relating to each other is not captured by representations—'these borrowed notions' are deemed immobilising.[48] Indeed, one of the aims of this thesis is to consider the feminist potential and problems of creating simulacra of one's sister and one's relationship with her: how does Woolf navigate language that by her own admission struggles to express that which goes on between two women?

As I researched sisters – in anthropology, psychoanalytical theory, sociology, cultural history and literature – I encountered an issue related to Woolf's and Irigaray's longing for a women's language that would appropriately describe women's relationships: sisters are largely invisible and often under-researched. Sisters have always existed, but the few experts that do specifically study them are in agreement about 'the lack of recognition given to the role of sisters'; Sue Kuba notes this in psychology, and Wallace ventures that in literature 'the subject of female homosociality seems actively to mark a text as *not* canonical.'[49] Often, I found the most relevant theoretical formulations of female homosociality in queer theory, which makes sense considering that 'the cultural lot of lesbianism' – as of sisterhood – 'is invisibility' and that each form of lateral female parity struggles to specify its existence and practices '*in its own terms* without references to the

[44] Irigaray, 'Questions', p.164.
[45] Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together', in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, pp.205—218 (212—3).
[46] Mitchell, p.52; Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.216.
[47] Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.216.
[48] Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.217.
[49] Sue Kuba, *The Role of Sisters in Women's Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.xiii; Wallace, p.6.

relational field of its others.'[50] A particularly compelling account of the similarities between siblinghood and queerness is offered by Denis Flannery's *On Sibling Love, Queer Attachment and American Writing* (2007), which sees siblinghood as '[a] form of love and primal mode of connection' that 'queers narratives of romantic love and therefore has a potentially complementary and deeply antagonistic relationship to modes of compulsory heterosexuality.'[51] Flannery recognises a 'discomfort' in acknowledging the 'structural similarity between sibling love and queer attachment', but points out that from 'any number of political perspectives, both are about similarity, both thrive – and need to play – with the difference within similarity.'[52] This similarity, I might add, is of course all the more pronounced when considering siblings of the same gender. Much like the queer figurations of kinship I glossed earlier, Flannery's understanding of siblinghood is about practice: 'even the "biological" elements which (sometimes) underpin [siblinghood] are discursively maintained.'[53] Queering – or admitting the presence of the queer in – Virginia's representations of her sister and their relationship poses its challenges: on one hand, I do not want to gratuitously eroticise the sororal bond or to imply that queer kinship is primarily about sexual practice; on the other hand, I do think it fruitful to see the sister relationship in terms of Adrienne Rich's call to 'deepen and broaden the range of what we define as lesbian existence' and to delineate 'the erotic in female terms'—an energy unconfined to the body and inherent to sharing work and "'joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic"'.[54] This balancing act continues throughout this thesis, and in Chapter 2 is enlivened by Mitchell's proposition that sexuality is integral to sibling relations.

The cultural and theoretical obscurity of sisters means that I am fairly liberal in bringing together different disciplines and borrowing terminology as appears useful. The most valuable term I have borrowed is sociologist Melanie Mauthner's 'sistering', which is a fittingly active word, portraying sistering as doing rather than being. Mauthner's *Sistering: Power and Change in Female Relationships* (2002) makes the most extensive attempt to create vocabulary for analysing sister relationships that I have encountered, and whilst I do not really use Mauthner's categories, *Sistering* does the important work of demonstrating that

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[50] Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p.1, 3. Original emphasis.
[51] Denis Flannery, *On Sibling Love, Queer Attachment and American Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.23.
[52] Flannery, p.18, 19.
[53] Flannery, p.18.
[54] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 4 (1980), p.650; Audre Lorde quoted in Rich, p.650.
Rich herself has linked familial relations—motherhood and daughterhood—to lesbian experience in *Of Woman Born*. I differ from her contention that '[b]efore sisterhood, there was [...] mother-and-daughterhood' in reading sisterhood as a parallel, horizontal alternative to the vertical relationship (*Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* [London: Virago, 1977], p.225).

sistering is socially constructed and that sisters' relationships tend to be deeply ambivalent.[55] Mauthner also observes that women's evolving subjectivities influence their sister ties, and, describing the relationship between the subjectivities and the sister bond, emphasises that 'subjectivity is experienced, theorised and constructed in relationships.'[56] The relational nature of subjectivity and the fact that 'it is constituted through discourses' mean that it is 'characterised by tensions and instability'.[57] The complicated and constructed nature of sistering and its impact on individual subjectivities is my focus in Chapter 1, but the whole thesis is informed by an underlying assumption that especially in her early representations of Vanessa and their relationship, Virginia was composing her own subjectivity.

Psychoanalytic accounts of siblings still remain few and ones dedicated to sisters are even scarcer, but I have benefited from Kuba's *The Role of Sisters in Women's Development* (2011), which is feminist and comprehensive. Kuba covers themes from performing family roles to sharing herstories and differentiating between the self and sister, and, importantly for my work, characterising some sisters' narratives as 're-authoring' familial or personal histories.[58] 'Re-authoring' not only imagines the sister as an author and a story-teller, but it also implies transformative power on her part and that aspects of the sister relationship may indeed be authored. Relatedly, Mauthner argues that the fluid, changing nature of sistering and the related pluralistic identities open 'sites for "rewriting" family scripts'—besides questioning the dominating Oedipal structures of family narratives, '*re*writing' suggests a possibility of improving and enhancing.[59] 'Family script' is a term used in family therapy and attachment theory – most notably by John Byng-Hall – to denote a repertoire of recognisable acts that condition how members of a family relate to each other.[60] They, too, are thought to be alterable and descriptive of the 'dialectical relationship between personal realities and social constructions', such as the scripts themselves.[61] My use of the term is loose, but I do consider Virginia's urge to author her sister relationship as part of a larger

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[55] Mauthner divides sisters into categories of '*best friendship*', '*close companionship*', and '*distant companionship*' and differentiates between '*positioned* and *shifting positions*'. I find these categories overlapping and somewhat confusing, but they certainly testify to the complexity of sistering practices (*Sistering: Power and Change in Female Relationships* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005]).
[56] Mauthner, p.11.
[57] B. Davies and C. Banks quoted in Mauthner, p.69.
[58] Kuba observed that re-authoring 'may come naturally to some women who sought more depth and intimacy in the sister connection.' One of the motivations for re-authoring one's story is managing one's emotions (pp.352—3).
[59] Mauthner, p.71.
[60] John Byng-Hall, *Rewriting Family Scripts: Improvisation and Systems Change* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1995).
[61] Joan Atwood (ed), *Family Scripts* (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis, 1996), p.xv.

project of rewriting, reorienting, and replacing inherited family scripts that emphasised patriarchal verticality.

This kind of writerly vocabulary is of course underlined by autobiographical premises, and indeed, my thesis draws from a rich tradition of reading Woolf autobiographically.[62] However, I propose an unusually intimate reading of the two poles of auto/biographical writing—writing the self and writing the other. Helpfully, Mauthner's understanding of feminine subjectivity and its relation to sistering also places auto/biographical narratives at the centre: her 'definition of subjectivity includes lived experience and narrative accounts of lives created through language or talk.'[63] Readings of women's lives and life-writing are typically characterised by an emphasis of their relationality, and critics have found this approach a good fit for interpreting Woolf too.[64] The trend remains to read Woolf's mother and, to a lesser extent, her father into her writing, not unjustifiably, but, to my mind, somewhat restrictively.[65] I am generally of the persuasion that '*all* autobiography may be relational' and that the links between self-narrating and the autobiographical representation of others are part of how subjectivity is constructed in life-writing.[66] The tension between the self and other in auto/biography is of particular interest to me and calls to mind theories of siblinghood—for example, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that '[i]nstead of seeing themselves as solely unique, women often explore their sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness.'[67] I hold that an awareness of this tension is vital, when attempting to increase our understanding of Vanessa's role in Virginia's auto/biographical works by retrieving the writing of the sister relationship from the partial obscurity it has fallen into, because a romanticised idea of relationality has led us to ignore some aspects of the sister relationship and Virginia's active writing of it.

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[62] Mark Hussey observes that 'Woolf was an artist explicitly concerned with the complex relationship between life and art, between narrative and self-consciousness; it is virtually impossible to find a work of Woolf criticism that is not in some sense "biographical", whatever its writer may protest' ('biographical approaches', in *Palgrave Advances in Virginia Woolf Studies*, ed. by Anna Snaith [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], pp.83—97 [93]).

[63] Mauthner, p.71.

[64] LuAnn McCracken's '"The Synthesis of My Being": Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf' is as an example of linking the relational self to the maternal.

[65] For a long time, the sibling that received most coverage in autobiographical readings of Woolf was George Duckworth, who molested her at a young age. Among sibling relations researchers making passing reference to this harmful relationship continues to be a common practice (see e.g. Edward, p.112).

[66] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp.3—52 (38).

[67] Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, pp.72—82 (79).

Autobiographical readings of Woolf are often guided by her contention that 'writing composes' 'the synthesis of my being', which once again highlights the compositional power of writing.[68] Linda Anderson paraphrases Woolf's 'The Lives of the Obscure' to claim that it is 'not possible to separate lives from books, or identities from how they are represented,' and that 'much of what we think of as "true" or historically given, is really an ideological construct; in other words, a fiction.'[69] This is in line with Adam Smyth's view that the 'separation of life as experience, and autobiography as written representation of experience [...] can become blurred', because autobiography 'might feed back into the lived life'.[70] This thesis suggests that such a blurring took place in Virginia's lived experience of her sister relationship with Vanessa and her written accounts of it, and that, rather than just reflecting the relationship, her writing also composed it. It is not, then, only Virginia's identity that is composed in her writing: it is also impossible to separate her sister's identity from its representations. Importantly, Virginia's writing of Vanessa and their relationship often capitalises on the possibility of reproducing and rewriting their relational herstory through a tendency for fiction or even fantasy. Such writing generates a sister relationship, aspects of which are realised textually and therefore traceably invented. So in Virginia's writing we encounter a sister 'acting/upon you like a drug or a chisel to remind you of your me-ness', in the words of Audre Lorde, and are accordingly compelled to read her work as dynamic acts of sistering: by writing about Vanessa, she not only composes her own identity through sisterly comparisons, but she also writes into being and maintains the existence of versions of her sister and their sisterhood.[71]

VANESSA AND VIRGINIA

Virginia and Vanessa's relationship continues to intrigue and inspire academic and non-academic writers alike. Of the several existing biographical accounts of Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf* (1996) continues to be the most comprehensive and offers a fair view on the sisters' relationship. Lee muses that '[t]heir rivalrous, mutually demanding and often critical intimacy was so deep as to be almost indescribable', and evokes Virginia's statement that 'my relation with Vanessa ... has been too deep for "scenes"', and her

[68] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980—1984), IV, p.161.
[69] Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.90. See Virginia Woolf, 'The Lives of the Obscure', in *Collected Essays*, Vol 4 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967), pp.120—133 (122).
[70] Adam Smyth (ed), *A History of English Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.4.
[71] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), p.147.

somewhat paradoxical tendency to depict it nonetheless.[72] Lee's observations about Vanessa's appearances in Virginia's writing offer substantial grounding for my analysis and are thus worth quoting at length:

> Virginia made version after version of her sister, never finalised or conclusive, in letters and diaries, in reminiscences, in family caricatures and in fiction, where Vanessa as a model overlaps and blurs with versions of Julia and with self-portraits: as the wise, maternal Helen Ambrose in *The Voyage Out*, as Katharine Hilbery working out her independence from the family in *Night and Day*, as Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, as the fecund, brooding Susan in *The Waves*, as the reserved Maggie Pargiter in *The Years*. In *Flush* she parodied her own devotion to Vanessa in the guise of the spaniel adoring his mistress. Very often the fictions of Vanessa have a monumental aspect, like the strange figure of the giant grey nurse who appears to Peter Walsh in his dream in *Mrs Dalloway*, metamorphosing as siren, guardian, goddess, mother. Similarly Vanessa shape-shifted through Virginia's life, taking the roles of mother, lover, conspirator and muse, but always characterised as silent, sensual, maternal, powerful, generous and implacable.[73]

Lee's identification of the fictionalised Vanessa's multiple guises is valuable, although to my mind there is once again a tendency to focus on the maternal at the expense of the sororal. In any case, this passage serves as an excellent summary of the general understanding of Virginia's portraits of her sister, both naming the characters explicitly modelled on Vanessa and acknowledging the more generic, mysterious monumentality. Besides the fictionalised portraits of Vanessa which this thesis explores – Phyllis Hibbert and Miss Tristram, Helen Ambrose, Katharine Hilbery, and the blended traits in Flush and Elizabeth Barrett Browning – I, too, recognise her in Mrs Ramsay, Susan, and Maggie Pargiter.[74]

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[72] Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), p.118; see Virginia Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp.78—160 (146).

[73] Lee, p.118. For cross-references to these characterisations, see Spalding, pp.24—5, 129, 153; Dunn, pp.5, 30, 88, 110, 151, 210—11, 219; Gillespie, pp.191—6, 203; Goldman (2001), p.149.

[74] In addition, Virginia's play *Freshwater* (1935) offers a composite portrait of two of her female family members, Julia Margaret Cameron and Vanessa, who played the role. Vanessa is of course a frequent figure in Virginia's autobiographical writings beyond 'Reminiscences'. In Virginia's short fiction, Vanessa-inspired sisters make appearances in 'The Mysterious Case of Miss V.' and 'The Shooting Party'. Lee points to what one might call a fantastical aspect of some of Virginia's Vanessa portraits by naming her as 'giant', 'siren', and 'goddess', the ethical implications of which are discussed in Chapter 3. This fantasy element means that sometimes glimpses of Vanessa may be detected in feminine figures that are strange and misty, like the nurse in *Mrs Dalloway*, but also less dispersed versions of this marvellous sister surface in scenes like the demonic dance of Sara and Maggie Pargiter in *The Years*.

Furthermore, all the roles Lee names – mother, lover, conspirator and muse, along with mistress, siren, guardian, and goddess – cut across the stories of the sisters' lives and will be addressed in my analyses of Virginia's work as palpable acts of sistering and as pursuing an imaginary and a vocabulary fit for the depiction of her sister and their relationship.

A plethora of other auto/biographical accounts have been instrumental to me besides Lee. For sororal equity, Lee is best paired with Frances Spalding's *Vanessa Bell: Portrait of the Bloomsbury Artist* (1983), which naturally views the relationship from an angle adjusted to Vanessa, although Spalding's general impression does not seem unlike Lee's: 'if their relationship was, from childhood, based on an exchange of natural affection and unforced admiration, it was also veined with antagonism and fortified by mutual need.'[75] Jane Dunn's *A Very Close Conspiracy: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf* (1990) is the most extensive rendition about the pair as sisters, and whilst it pays attention to the particularity of their *sororal* bond – 'With sisters, there is the possibility of the most intimate and enduring of relationships' – it also occasionally uncritically rehearses the essentialist and delimiting juxtapositions that have defined them; from the Introduction, we have a Vanessa who 'took sexuality and motherhood' opposed to Virginia's 'intellectuality and imagination', contemporaneously with claims of the relationship's 'symbiotic' nature.[76] However, Dunn's romanticism balances well with interpretations like Panthea Reid's. Her *Art and Affection: A Life of Virginia Woolf* (1996) is a breath of fresh – though perhaps groundlessly rough – air to any summary of the sisters' relationship, since Vanessa plays the villain's role in it.[77]

Even without touching upon Vanessa's role as her sister's co-creator or formal influence, it is difficult to delimit her presence in Virginia's fiction to a list of particular characters; even a text that might at first sight seem far from sororal themes, may turn out to be strangely familiar at a closer look, which might be exemplified by Virginia's presenting a copy of *Orlando* to Vanessa with the inscription 'from her Slave, & Sister'. ('ORLANDO. Presentation Copy To Vanessa Bell', *Biblio.com.au* <https://biblio.com.au/book/orlando-presentation-copy-vanessa-bell-woolf/d/623948408?dcx=623948408> [accessed 9.7.2020])

[75] Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell: Portrait of the Bloomsbury Artist* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), p.8.
In her 2016 preface, Spalding assumes that some of her readers are motivated by a fascination with the sisters' relationship: 'the mere names—Vanessa and Virginia—immediately conjure up in the public mind a pair of sisters, gifted and beautiful' (p.xiii). One way of countering this conjuring is paying attention to Spalding's sober account of Vanessa as a professional artist.

[76] Jane Dunn, *A Very Close Conspiracy* (London: Pimlico, 1990), p.vii, 1.

[77] Reid is remarkably negative about the sister relationship. Her index entries list Vanessa's characteristics as 'bohemianism, self-absorption, callousness, indulgence, not demonstrative', and describe the sister relationship by repeating words like 'alienation', 'distance' and 'distrust' (pp.546—7). Reid sees Vanessa's influence on Virginia's mental health as mainly negative and accuses her of causing some of Virginia's mental troubles. This is rather harsh, but may serve as a healthy reminder of the negative aspects of the often-idealised bond. Much of this harshness can be explained by Reid's original aim—tracing Virginia's relations with Roger Fry and Vanessa—which interpreted Virginia's aesthetic insecurities as turning into jealousy over Clive Bell and Roger (Panthea Reid Broughton, 'The Blasphemy of Art: Fry's Aesthetics and Woolf's Non-"Literary" Stories', in *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Diane Gillespie [Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993], pp.36—57 [38]). This configuration would have seen Vanessa as the antagonist; for my part, I wish to avoid taking a love triangle, or rivalry over a man, as the primary shape to define the sister relationship, although triangles certainly play a part.

These and other biographies, as well as my thesis, are supported by an extensive body of autobiographical writing, mainly from Virginia – whose six volumes of letters, five volumes of diaries, and memoir-collection *Moments of Being* refer to Vanessa constantly – but also from Vanessa, whose *Selected Letters* (ed. Regina Marler) reproduce something of her voice, but whose memoir *Sketches in Pen and Ink* (ed. Lia Giachero) and hundreds of unpublished letters remain understudied.[78] I have tried to do my share to rectify this fact by citing from them, besides occasionally discussing Vanessa's visual work and its dialogic relationship with Virginia's sisterly representations in order to keep her voice present. In any case, it ought to be noted that the imbalance of power which characterised the sisters' verbal and written exchanges during their life has inevitably survived into their posthumous representations, with Virginia's powerful and persuasive pen charming its way through to both public and specialist imaginations.

Vanessa Stephen was born 30 May 1879; Virginia followed two years and eight months later on 25 January 1882. The sisters and their brothers Thoby (born September 1880) and Adrian (born October 1883) composed their own Stephen unit, the exclusivity of which is made clear by the sisters' use of the plural first-person pronoun: 'When I say "we"', Vanessa writes, 'I mean the Stephen members of the household only'.[79] The other family members – their parents Leslie Stephen and Julia (née Jackson), and their half-siblings George, Stella and Gerald Duckworth and Laura Stephen, who were all considerably older – existed outside the young Stephens, whom Vanessa's daughter Angelica Garnett considers to have lived 'very much on top of one another' and having 'form[ed] a family within a family'.[80] The sisters' early childhood was happy, especially during the summers which the family spent in St Ives.[81] A valuable look into the early years is provided by Virginia, Vanessa and Thoby's family newspaper, *Hyde Park Gate News* (1891—95), which is the

[78] Reid has criticised Marler's selection for not showing 'more of the meaner side of Vanessa's personality', wanting the 'less admirable' Bell to be represented, '[s]ince Virginia Woolf's worst suspicion was that her sister secretly despised her, and since many of Vanessa's letters (not represented here) justify that suspicion' (Panthea Reid, '[Review of] *Letters of Vanessa Bell*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880—1920*, 2 [1995], p.211). Presuming that Reid is referring to letters Vanessa wrote to others about Virginia, I have not come across anything remarkably mean—her meanness appears to be within the normal bounds of a close, rivalrous—and admittedly, at times, contemptuous—sister relationship. (See e.g. Reid's *Arts and Affection*, p.109, where she points out that Vanessa and Adrian would sometimes "pick [Virginia] to pieces", which sounds like normal sibling gossip.

[79] Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed. by Lia Giachero (Pimlico, 1997), [Random House eBooks kindle edition], loc1034—9. Hereafter '*Sketches*'.

[80] Angelica Garnett, 'Prologue' to *Sketches*, loc276—7.

[81] Marion Dell and Marion Whybrow's *Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: Remembering St Ives* (2003) and Whybrow's *Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: A Childhood in St Ives* (2014) demonstrate how very resonant and formative the Cornish summers were for the sisters. Another place-focused overview of these early years is given in Vanessa Curtis' *The Hidden Houses of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (2005), which glosses the numerous houses—and their formative effects—that the sisters shared between 1882 and 1908.

closest we get to the young siblings' own representation of their lives. Unsurprisingly, noting Vanessa's observation that her sister was 'very sensitive to criticism and the good opinions of the grown-ups', the newspaper has Virginia's wit and swank written all over it: she is the main author, and reports on events she could expect her readership – her parents – to be pleased by.[82] This vertical orientation is exemplified by her serialised story 'The Experiences of a Paterfamilias' and by the fact that her sister typically features as a minor character, visiting some relative, most enthusiastically her 'beloved Thoby'.[83] When the sisters' interactions are referred to, these are focused around a letter from Thoby, for example, or are glossed over without much exposé. This suggests both a privacy in the sisters' affairs and an expectation that the readers might not be interested in the 'various subjects' the Misses Stephen 'discours[ed]' with 'their intimate friends the Misses Milman'.[84] This public – in this case, public means parent-facing – silence about the sisters' private relationship presents an interesting comparison to Virginia's later characterisations of the relationship as having 'held possibilities' ever since the sisters were small enough to crawl under the nursery-table, and hints at early and enduring textual manipulations of her representations of Vanessa and their bond.[85]

The disaster of their mother's untimely death hit the family in May 1895, when Vanessa was almost 16 and Virginia 13. Maggie Humm focuses heavily on the impact of her death in *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (2002) and *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (2006), which interpret the sisters' photo-albums as revealing an 'emotional, psychic investment in memories of' Julia, and, remarking on the similarities between the sisters' albums, conclude that both 'are drawn to the maternal.'[86] Although in my view Humm sometimes highlights the maternal at the expense of lateral significance, her work on the sisters has led to recent valuable remarks on their relationship and connection. Humm has come closest to considering the particularly sororal aspects of the relationship, illustrating Vanessa's importance for the development of Virginia's self through 'a kind of *prosopopoeia*— a coming to know herself, to know her own identity, through another' in her 'reviews of

[82] *Sketches*, loc718.
[83] Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell with Thoby Stephen, *Hyde Park Gate News: The Stephen Family Newspaper*, ed. by Gill Lowe (London: Hesperus Press, 2005), p.131.
[84] *Hyde Park Gate News*, p.68.
[85] Virginia Woolf, 'Reminiscences', in *Moments of Being*, pp.1—30 (2).
[86] Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p.7, 68.

Bell's exhibitions, and descriptions of her sister in diaries and letters.'[87] Whilst I have no quarrel with her argument that 'Bell's art allows Woolf to remove the spectacles of modernist subjectivity, and to experience an empathetic somatic being', I am hesitant about the extent to which the sisters' exchange can be called 'truly empathetic'.[88] For example, while Virginia's 1930 foreword to *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell* does indeed demonstrate her 'desire to know, to become the "Other"' as well as her 'entitlement as sister, to Bell's embodiment',[89] the manuscript draft reveals that the central scenes are structured around the narrator's attempts to approach Bell and her work and the three consequent rebuffs.[90] Traces of the manuscript's frustration can be found behind the published version, for example, Bell's stubbornness in saying 'nothing' began as the accusation that 'Mrs Bell lures us on & then leaves us'[91]—which complicates Humm's 'truly empathetic' claims. Nonetheless, Humm's reading of Virginia's writing about Vanessa as 'show[ing] a self in process', although focused on composing the author's identity rather than the sisterhood, is very thought-provoking.[92]

In Woolf studies, there is no shortage of accounts describing and speculating on the importance of the mother and her tragic death, with Ellen Bayuk Rosenman's *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship* (1986) remaining a dependable departure-point. Critics have examined both the autobiographical significance of Julia and more general ideas of motherhood and the maternal in Woolf's work, the most enduring and inspirational one of which remains the pronouncement in *A Room of One's Own*, that 'we think back through our mothers if we are women'.[93] Here, too, my thesis changes the emphasis: instead of the 'mothers', I am interested in the 'we' who share the mother. Consequently, the figure of the mother often shows up in a dubious light in this thesis, because of its focus on the sister relationship in which Vanessa's motherhood aroused

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[87] Maggie Humm, 'Virginia Woolf, Intimacy and Identity', in *Virginia Woolf: An Exhibition Inspired by Her Writing*, ed. by Laura Smith, Enrico Tassi and Eloise Bennett (London: Tate Publishing, 2018), pp.105—108 (105).

[88] Maggie Humm, 'Contradictions in Autobiography: Virginia Woolf's Writings on Art', *in Contradictory Woolf*, ed. by Derek Ryan and Stella Bolaki (Clemson University Digital Press, 2012), pp.74—81 (80); Humm (2018), p.108.
I am also doubtful about the benefits of genetic criticism, which Humm uses as her theoretical backing, but which I have deliberately avoided in favour of socially constructed ideas of kinship.

[89] Humm (2012), p.78.

[90] NYPL, Berg Collection, [Articles, essays, fiction, and reviews, 1924—1940] Notebook dated June 18, 1929, 'Pictures by Vanessa Bell', [pp.5—6].

[91] NYPL, Berg, 'Pictures by Vanessa Bell', [p.7].

[92] Maggie Humm, 'Autobiographical Interfaces: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 79 (2011), p.12.

[93] *A Room of One's Own*, p.57. This phrase alone has been employed in analyses of autobiographical influences (see e.g. Katherine Dalsimer, 'Virginia Woolf: Thinking Back Through Our Mothers' [2004]) and of feminist struggle (e.g. Jane Marcus, 'Thinking Back through Our Mothers' [1985]).

strongly antithetical feelings in Virginia. The motherhood she associated with her sister is often rigid, immovable, and dumb; for example by comparing Vanessa and her 'maternal partiality' to 'a stone wall', Virginia's rhetoric positions this monolithic mother as antagonistic towards the demands she felt entitled to make of Vanessa as her sister.[94] An examination of one sister's jealous portrayal of the other's motherhood as objectionable may help us to understand why the mother in Woolf is sometimes simplistic.

Certainly the loss of their mother at such a tender age and the consequent loss of Stella, who had filled Julia's place to the best of her ability, two years later, and Vanessa's ensuing ascension to female head of their father's household led to Virginia's intensified emphasis of Vanessa's motherly qualities. To an extent, Vanessa was game for adopting a maternal role in relation to Virginia: especially before the Woolfs' marriage, Vanessa promised to care for her sick sister – 'I don't find boiling milk interesting, but I'll do it for you when you have appendicitis' – and to inspect Virginia's suitors, considering that 'I should get on quite well with [Hilton Young] as a mother in law'.[95] The common tendency to highlight this role should however be tempered by the fact that she at least partly shared Virginia's disgust at 'the maternal instinct' and her admission that in practical things, she relied on her sister, whom she admitted to 'despatch [practical jobs] with great brilliance'.[96]

Between 1897 and 1904, when Virginia and Vanessa were the only women in their immediate family, they 'formed together a very close conspiracy'; in Virginia's recollection, 'we formed our private nucleus. I visualise it as a little sensitive centre of acute life; of instantaneous sympathy, in the great echoing shell of Hyde Park Gate.'[97] After Leslie's death in 1904, the Stephens moved to Bloomsbury, a change which appeared remarkable to them, and, as Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace write, the move 'signified, for them, escape from a family oppression they explicitly identified as patriarchal.'[98] In their newly lateral family, Virginia recalls, with a meaningful repetition of 'we', '[w]e were full of experiments and reforms. [...] we were going to paint; to write'.[99] This happy living among siblings did not last long: Thoby died in November 1906, and Vanessa married Clive Bell less than three months later. Vanessa's romantic attachment transferred to Roger Fry in 1911, and two years later, to Duncan Grant. Virginia and Leonard married in 1912. In 1916, Vanessa and Duncan moved to Charleston with her sons, Julian (b.1908) and Quentin

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[94] *Diary*, IV, p.264.
[95] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 12 August 1908; NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 16 August 1908.
[96] See for example NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 9 March 1928; NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 20 April 1908.
[97] 'Sketch of the Past', p.146.
[98] Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.162.
[99] Virginia Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', in *Moments of Being*, pp.43—61 (46).

(b.1910), and in 1918, their daughter Angelica was born—the artists' unorthodox partnership continued until Vanessa's death in 1961.[100] The bulk of my chapters focus on the first two decades of the century – which for the sisters were tumultuous and formative – proposing that the full autobiographical significance of Virginia's early writing is yet to be recognised.

Virginia's work took a turn to modernism in the late 1910s – Vanessa had already taken the plunge earlier in the decade – and is marked by her two short-stories, 'Mark on the Wall' (1917) and 'Kew Gardens' (1919), the former of which inspired Vanessa to suggest a professional collaboration to her sister, which was then realised in her illustrations for the latter. Virginia's first Hogarth Press novel, the increasingly experimental *Jacob's Room* (1922), was written in homage to Thoby; it was also the first Vanessa made a cover for—she was to provide the cover-designs for almost all of her sister's books thereafter. Diane Gillespie's account of their artistic and professional collaborations, *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (1988), remains to date the most influential publication on the sisters and provides a well-researched and observant analysis of their collaborations and working relationship.[101] This thesis, though, does not focus on the sisters' professional collaboration, which has already received substantial critical attention.[102]

Further reassessments of the sisters' relationship are due thanks to the recent reappraisals of Vanessa Bell as an important modernist artist in her own right.[103] Grace Brockington's 'A "Lavender Talent" or "The Most Important Woman Painter in Europe"? Reassessing Vanessa Bell' is an excellent overview of the emboldened considerations of Bell's significance, and the 2017 Dulwich Picture Gallery exhibition of her work was similarly oriented, seeing Bell 'as one of the most forward-looking, uncompromising British

[100] Vanessa and Duncan's professional relationship has been researched at length and in detail in Darren Clarke's thesis *The politics of partnership: Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, 1912—1961.*

[101] See for example her analysis of Vanessa's illustrations (1919, 1927) for *Kew Gardens* in 'Chapter 3. Criticism and Collaboration'. The 1927 edition of *Kew Gardens*, with Vanessa's illustrations intertwining with Virginia's text on every page, is the most complete collaboration they produced.

[102] Besides Gillespie, I find other comparative analyses helpful, such as Justyna Kostkowska's '*Studland Beach* and *Jacob's Room*: Vanessa Bell's and Virginia Woolf's Experiments in Portrait Making 1910—1922' (2011); also work specialised on Vanessa's cover-designs is valuable, see Tony Bradshaw's 'Virginia Woolf and Book Design' (2010) and his *Bloomsbury Artists: Prints and Book Designs* (1999). Julia Briggs' versatile *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2006) offers thoughts on the dust-jackets and their relationship to the books.

[103] Older, but still valuable accounts of Bell's work are provided by Richard Shone's *The Art of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant* (1999) and even his original *Bloomsbury Portraits: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and their circle* (1976), as well as Isabelle Anscombe's *Omega and after: Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts* (1981). Christopher Reed's *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (2004) is well-argued and indispensable in thinking about Bell's domesticity.

artists of the twentieth century.'[104] New Bell scholarship naturally leaks into Woolf studies, and Hana Leaper's work on the sisters succeeds in bringing the personal into their professional collaborations without romanticising. Her analysis of Vanessa's process of designing the dust-jacket for *The Death of the Moth* (1942) concludes with the vital notice

> that we must reassess long held beliefs that reduce Bell's role in the dustjacket designs, and indeed her wide creative relationship with Woolf, to acts of telepathy. This AGG [Angelica Garnett Gift] sketchbook shows that Bell's agency in the sisters' relationship, as well as her independent stature as an important British artist, must be further recognized.[105]

Locating Vanessa's agency within the sisters' relationship is, I think, necessary not only in reassessments of her professional achievements, but also in a more comprehensive reading of the sisters' bond as well as in interpretations of Virginia's Vanessa-inspired characters and her written work more broadly.

Another essential resource on the sisters' professional activities is Jane Goldman's *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woof* (1998), especially chapters 9—12. Taking her cue from Gillespie's work where 'Bell emerges as the primary influence from the visual arts upon Woolf's literary aesthetic', Goldman continues analysing the impact of 'the practice and ideas of the woman artist closest to Woolf', paralleling Vanessa's development as a colourist with Woolf's theories of colour and light.[106] Goldman's analysis importantly offers a reading of post-impressionist use of 'colour as independent of [Fry and Clive Bell's theories of] significant form', proposing that Vanessa's 'development as a colourist, and Woolf's response to Post-Impressionism, including, in particular, her understanding of her sister's work, may be at odds with the theories of Fry and Clive Bell.'[107] Besides this vital feminist gesture of entertaining the possibility of locating the sisters at some distance from Fry and Bell, Goldman argues against a homogenisation of the sisters' aesthetic practice.[108] Like Gillespie, Goldman remarks on the sisters' tendencies to reproduce '"each in her own

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[104] Grace Brockington, 'A "Lavender Talent" or "The Most Important Woman Painter in Europe"? Reassessing Vanessa Bell', *Art History*, 36 (2013), 129—153; Ian A.C. Dejardin, 'Preface' to *Vanessa Bell*, ed. by Sarah Milroy and Ian A.C. Dejardin (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), pp.19—22 (22).
[105] Hana Leaper, 'A Bloomsbury Miscellany from the Charleston Attic', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 87 (2015), p.45. See also Leaper's '"Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!": Vanessa Bell's *Death of the Moth Dust* Jacket as Monument to Virginia Woolf' (2017).
[106] Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.115.
[107] Goldman (2001), p.123, 130.
[108] Goldman (2001), p.116.

medium, the intimacy of the women"', and to use colours to convey this 'sense of collective communication.'[109] Goldman observes them showing 'communication between people as material events' and 'emphasizing and illuminating feminine experience.'[110] This analysis, in recognising the personal and political significance of Woolf's treatment of colour and in acknowledging Vanessa as her sister's likely-closest aesthetic ally, opens a productive way of reading the sisters' professional relationship from a level-headed feminist angle.

Many critics have naturally also written on the sisters' positions at the cultural and social centre of the Bloomsbury Group. The sisters certainly thought themselves the centre of the Group—witness Vanessa's expectation that '<u>all</u> our friends' will follow her to South Europe, or indeed 'the South Sea Islands if we decide on them': 'It will strike them, a little late, as it has about Sussex & Bloomsbury, that those are the places to live in'.[111] Among the numerous works that set the sisters within wider contexts, Bloomsbury or the modernist era in general, Mary Ann Caws's *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (1990) has not aged well and sometimes looks flimsily researched, but is an interesting example of 'personal criticism' – a seemingly inevitable phenomenon in research on the sisters[112] – and contains some influential readings of the women's oeuvre. Another problematic monograph aligning Woolf with her contemporaries is Vanessa Curtis' *Virginia Woolf's Women* (2002), which uncritically regurgitates phrases like 'this voluptuous sister', 'real woman', 'innate femininity', and promotes an understanding of the sororal relationship in terms that are exclusively either maternal or erotic.[113] Peter Stansky's *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World* (1997) is more nuanced and historical; whereas Bonnie Kime Scott's *Refiguring Modernism: Women of 1928* (1995) and Elliott and Wallace's *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings* (1994) link the sisters to modernist phenomena.[114] These studies are engaged in the important '[w]eb-work', to borrow Scott's phrase, of linking Woolf to other women and her intimate contemporaries, but their scope is more general than mine: keeping in mind Mitchell's claim

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[109] Gillespie (p.111) quoted in Goldman (2001), p.149; Goldman (2001), p.149.
[110] Goldman (2001), p.150.
[111] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 16 April 1927.
Those interested in the sisters' comparable Sussex houses should consult Nuala Hancock's *Charleston and Monk's House: The Intimate House Museums of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (2012).
[112] See e.g. Humm's brave admission of inevitable 'autobiographical identifications' due to losing her mother as a 13-year-old (Humm [2002], p.223).
[113] Vanessa Curtis, *Virginia Woolf's Women* (London: Robert Hale, 2002), p.22, 76, 22, 62.
One strange underlying current here is the sanctity of heterosexual marriage: Curtis condemns Vanessa's relationships with Roger and Duncan as 'damaging affairs' and Clive's 13-year-relationship with Mary Hutchinson gets the dismissive label 'affair' (p.67, 62).
[114] *Virginia Woolf and Her Female Contemporaries: Selected Papers from the 25th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf* (ed. Vandivere, 2016) thinks about 'contemporary' in expansive ways, but shockingly includes no work on her and Vanessa.

that all lateral relations follow from siblingship, I am invested in the primacy and particularity of the sister bond.[115] My approach is also more text-focused, as I am interested in how the relationship happens in the writing.

A much-needed update to Bloomsbury criticism was brought by Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff's *Queer Bloomsbury* (2016), which aligns the Group with present-day queer (and kinship) theory, seeing the Group's artistic and living practices through the idea of conviviality, attesting that intimate living together 'shape[s] and reshape[s]' culture.[116] Two terms employed in *Queer Bloomsbury* feel particularly resonant to me: Firstly, Eve Sedgwick's 'beside', which contains the possibility of multiplicity and the interest of which "'does not [...] depend on a fantasy on metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings.'"[117] She continues: "'*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.'"[118] This passing reference to siblings in a queer context is a curious phenomenon and symptomatic of queer theory's unwillingness to acknowledge the sibling.[119] However, as the second term that attracted me shows, the structural similarities between queerness and siblingship stalk the margins of queer analysis of Bloomsbury, too: Kimberly Engdahl Coates evokes Sara Ahmed's contention that '[a] queer phenomenology [...] might begin by redirecting or reorienting our attention toward queer moments, moments at which the world appears "slantwise"'.[120] Ahmed encourages such 'slantwise' seeing to combat calls to 'become vertical' or to 'straighten up', and such 'politics of disorientation' ought to help us "wonder about the very forms of social gathering."[121] In the wake of productive queer criticism on the Group, I hope we can explore that other 'slantwise' and – in this case – homosocial practice, namely siblings, and so respond to the

[115] Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.xxxiii.
[116] Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff, 'Introduction' to *Queer Bloomsbury*, ed. by Brenda Helt and Madelyn Detloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp.1—12 (2).
[117] Quoted in Helt and Detloff, p.2; see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p.8.
[118] Quoted in Helt and Detloff, p.2; Sedgwick, p.8.
[119] See Flannery's discussion of Sedgwick, whom he considers haunted by the figure of siblings (p.8).
[120] Kimberly Engdahl Coates, 'Virginia Woolf's Queer Time and Place: Wartime London and a World Aslant', in *Queer Bloomsbury*, pp.276—293 (277); see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p.65.
[121] Coates, p.277.

occasional past calls, for example by Diana Swanson, to read Woolf's family relations and their written reflections more horizontally.[122]

The 1930s saw both sisters in relative professional and financial security.[123] This decade was perhaps the most balanced one in the sisters' relationship; although Virginia's letters continued to 'wish dolphin [i.e. Vanessa] were by my side, in a bath, bright blue, with her tail curled' and lament that '[m]y love has always been fuller than your thimble', she also cared for Vanessa during emotionally challenging times.[124] A number of deaths in their near circle shook the sisters, especially Fry's in 1934, and Vanessa's first-born Julian's in 1937. Julian's death devastated Vanessa, and Virginia cared for her in the weeks after; in an unevenly scribbled note, Vanessa later wrote to Virginia, 'You do know really dont you how much you help me. I cant show it & I feel so stupid & such a wet blanket often but I couldnt get on at all if it werent for you'.[125] Virginia also helped to posthumously preserve Roger and Julian: The Hogarth Press published a memoir of her nephew with some of his writings, and she struggled through the jarring work of writing Roger's life, in order to 'have the whole book typed & in Nessa's hand by Xmas—by force'.[126] Vanessa received the biography with another shakily-written, emotional note: 'Since Julian died I havent been able to think of Roger. Now you have brought him back to me—Although I cannot help crying I cant thank you enough'.[127] These demonstrations of feeling were contrasted with stretches of space and distance between the sisters; Vanessa and Duncan spent months at a time in France, and the sisters wrote to each other relatively infrequently.[128] Interesting sources for these years are the Bloomsbury memoirs that amassed in the following decades, the most evocative of which is Angelica Garnett's *Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury*

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[122] Swanson's 'An Antigone Complex? The Political Psychology of *The Years* and *Three Guineas*' (1997) draws attention to the horizontal vision of the brothers and sisters in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, shifting focus from Oedipal verticality.

[123] Vanessa's financial situation was, not-insignificantly, enhanced by her sister's habit of sending her money and providing Angelica with an allowance. Kuba sees financial support as care (p.171), which complicates the usual figurations of Vanessa as the caregiver. Care tends to be an important factor especially in aging sisters' lives (Kuba, p.359).

[124] *Letters*, VI, p.153, 157.

[125] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW. The dating is uncertain, but was probably 4 February 1938, which would have been Julian's 30th birthday.

[126] *Diary*, V, p.241.

[127] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, midnight, 13 March 1940.

[128] Contrary to popular belief, Virginia and Vanessa did not write to each other every day. A daily exchange seems to have been the standard during Virginia's illness in 1904 and for some time in 1906—7. However, already in 1917, Vanessa could ask Virginia, 'Why dont you write to me every day?' and in 1927, she 'wish[ed] our good old habit of a daily letter still existed' (NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 4 December 1917; NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 5 February 1927). In 1933, Vanessa stopped addressing her letters to 'My Billy' and developed a habit of diving straight into her news, and in 1938, the sisters seem to have had a habit of speaking on the phone on Mondays.

Childhood (1984).[129] Garnett imitates her aunt's style and paints several atmospheric descriptions of her mother and aunt, recycling many of the family scripts she inherited; in her memories, too, the sisters have something of 'their own': she remembers them sitting, Virginia 'smoking, talking to Vanessa about cousins seen again after many years, and laughing about them in their own quiet, throwaway fashion, like two birds on a perch'.[130]

Overall, the sisters' professional relationship has been the subject of substantial criticism which has significantly increased our understanding of the formal and aesthetic affinities in their work. Likewise, the personal relationship itself has been scrutinised extensively in biographies. The existing gap and what this research wants to address lie somewhere between these two approaches—an examination of the sisters *as sisters* and of the sisterhood's implications for Woolf's work. I believe that a closer, more autobiographical look at her fiction can contribute to our understanding of her writing, its processes and development, its pervasive autobiographical substance, as well as a more specified appreciation of her ideas on characterisation and portrayal, fact and fiction, feminism, family, and social organisation of life. It is my wish that moments of this thesis can also make similar observations of Bell's work and to provide a balanced view of the complex sister relationship. By filling this space with research informed by theory on kinship, siblings and sisters, we can increase our knowledge of modernist and more specifically Bloomsbury (re)structurings of family and offer more generally applicable insights into the life and work of siblings who produce art alongside each other. Broadly speaking, I continue the undermining of perceptions of artists as isolated islands, demonstrating a very intimate and permeating presence of an other in the output of this particular sister.

WRITING VANESSA

Virginia's suicide on 28 March 1941 is repeated in the public imagination with distressing frequency. Much of her life has become the stuff of legends, including her relationship with Vanessa. Writers of biofiction – see Susan Sellers' *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008) and Priya Parmar's *Vanessa and Her Sister* (2016) – have also found the sororal relationship of interest.

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[129] Those studying aunt-niece-relationships will be interested in Virginia's habit of imposing invented characters on Angelica, too. Jan Marsh paraphrases Angelica: 'Virginia insisted on playing a fantasy game in which Angelica was Pixerina and she herself was Witcherina. They pretended to fly between houses, over the trees and Downs between Rodmell and Charleston, all the while inventing improbable stories about other members of the family. [...] although [Angelica] loved Virginia's make-believe she also sensed that she was being subtly taken advantage of, for Virginia's own ends' (*Bloomsbury Women: Distinct Figures in Life and Art* [London: Pavilion Books, 1995], pp.136—8).

[130] Angelica Garnett, *Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood* (London: Pimlico, 1995), p.111.

Analysing Sellers' novel, Bethany Layne suggests that biofiction might be academically valuable in its ability to '"delve into [the subject's] imaginary world"' and thereby opening new routes to 'the hidden depths of the subject.'[131] Certainly Sellers refreshingly goes beyond the usual popular characterisations of the sisters that depend on dichotomies such as intellectual/carnal, asexual/sexual, insane/sane by her emphasis of 'mutual engagement' and 'appreciation of the interconnections'.[132] Sellers' novel draws from her knowledge as a Woolf scholar and toys with the possibility that Vanessa might have wanted, in some ways, to escape her imposing sister. Sellers' narrator Vanessa suggests that 'what you [Virginia] like best' is to 'invent me to your heart's content' and she hears Virginia's accusation: 'you always complain if I write about you.'[133] These statements are not pulled out of thin air and validly imply some of the questions central to this thesis. What might we learn of Virginia's portraits of Vanessa if we considered them as inventions? How did these inventions relate to, reflect and influence their relationship as sisters? Why did Virginia repeatedly write about Vanessa and why might Vanessa have 'complained' about this writing, and how might we, consequently, treat it critically?

Of Vanessa's surviving protestations regarding Virginia's characterisations of her, the most widely-cited one is her letter to Clive from 1910:

> Virginia since early youth has made it her business to create a character for me according to her own wishes & has now so succeeded in imposing it upon the world that these preposterous stories are supposed to be certainly true because so characteristic.[134]

Although this was a reaction to a particular incident, Vanessa's point about Virginia's continuous process of creating a character for her is more general, and with the publication of Virginia's novels, it literally became her business.[135] Dunn sees an 'undeniable truth at the heart of the representation', but one that was 'coloured up and distorted at the expense of other less picturesque or convenient truths.'[136] Spalding's assessment that '[t]throughout

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[131] Monica Latham quoted in Bethany Layne, 'The "Supreme Portrait Artist" and the "Mistress of the Phrase": Contesting Oppositional Portrayals of Woolf and Bell, Life and Art, in Susan Sellers's *Vanessa and Virginia*', in *Woolf Studies Annual* (2015), p.78; Layne, p.78.
[132] Layne, p.91, 92.
[133] Susan Sellers, *Vanessa and Virginia* (Ross-shire: Two Ravens Press, 2008), p.140, 132.
[134] Quoted in Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Volume One: Virginia Stephen 1882—1912* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p.163, Lee, p.119, Dunn, p.143, Spalding, p.130.
[135] Quentin Bell provides the background story of Virginia narrating an incident concerning the Bells in a letter to Saxon Sydney-Turner, and diplomatically, and vaguely, considers that 'usually there was a scintilla although not much more than a scintilla of truth in Virginia's inventions' (p.163).
[136] Dunn, p.143.

her life Virginia seems to have had a need in her writing to draw on her knowledge and understanding of Vanessa' is most productive as it thinks about the effects of such mythologisation: Virginia 'found that by underlining and exaggerating certain aspects of Vanessa's character, she retained her hold on her.'[137] Spalding also notes that Vanessa's 'line of self-mockery' and emphasis of absurd habits resulted in her coming 'more and more to resemble Virginia's invention.'[138] I am not so much interested in uncovering the truth – whatever that may be – about Vanessa from underneath Virginia's characterisations, as in analysing Virginia's character-making as a process with real-life motivations and consequences.

Among Vanessa's unpublished protestations, a letter from 25 June 1910, found in the Berg Collection, is most expressive. In an emotional response to Virginia's 'fear [that] you abuse me a good deal in private' expressed the day before, Vanessa tells 'My Billy' 'how very silly & completely cracked I think you'.[139] Diverting from her usual habit of caring and coaxing during Virginia's ill spells, Vanessa tells her sister off for 'talk[ing] such nonsense', being indulgent and 'depressing'. She is clearly pained by the accusation, writing unusually fervently:

> I have no doubt whatever that however much I may abuse you – & of course my nature is so vicious that abuse is always attractive – still the general affect left on my hearers is that I have a far higher opinion of you than you give yours to understand that you have of me. Faint praise may possibly be more in your line. But you will never see it, though I suppose you know that you do talk & think a great deal of nonsense.

She then addresses one of Virginia's commonest characterisations of her, inarticulateness:

> You are always telling me how incapable of speech I am & then you are always expecting me to grow a tongue. A student of character ought to know better. Shall I turn into a writer one of these days, do you think? One would almost say you did hope & expect it. As well expect the worm to grow wings. I am no caterpillar.

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[137] Spalding, pp.129—30.
[138] Spalding, p.130.
[139] *Letters*, I, p.429; NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 25 June 1910. Further references in this paragraph are to this letter.

After this, Vanessa states 'Well I hope this is lucid', and moves on to their summer plans. These passages demonstrate an acute understanding of the kind of character Virginia imagined her to be – in particular, emotionally cold and inarticulate – even as they simultaneously undermine such characterisation. Especially against Virginia's uses of caterpillars and butterflies as symbols of growth, Vanessa's image of herself as 'the worm [...] no caterpillar' is not only lucid, but sad and upsetting.[140] Vanessa is evidently hurt by Virginia's mythologising of her inarticulateness, but while she ridicules it, she is also implying Virginia should stick to it, as if to curb all the possible imagined guises.

On the whole, Vanessa tends to keep her distance to Virginia's epistolary and fictional characterisations of her, which often overlap. Her recorded reactions to both *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* sound disinterested in the characters based on her, Helen Ambrose and Katharine Hilbery, and after reading both novels she tried to direct her correspondent Roger's attention to other characters: about *The Voyage Out*, she wrote 'the minor characters seem to me more interesting than the principal ones', and although she thought Roger might 'see what I was like at 18' in Katharine, she expected her to be a 'very priggish and severe young woman' and that 'the most interesting character is evidently my mother, who is made exactly like Lady Ritchie'.[141] To Virginia's description of writing Vanessa as Katharine Hilbery – 'you've got to be immensely mysterious and romantic'[142] – Vanessa reacted amicably though heedlessly: 'I <u>thought</u> I <u>understood</u> but perhaps I didnt', she wrote and noted that Roger 'couldn't make head or tail of [your description of me].'[143] In 1923, Vanessa was amused by Virginia's 'Scenes in the Life of Mrs Bell' in the *Charleston Bulletin*, which recycled familial myths of her losing umbrellas and mixing up proverbs, but remarked to Virginia that '[n]ot a single word of it's true of course.'[144] In 1929, Vanessa received Virginia's upbeat letter which chided 'Dolphin [for] being a beast covered with brine who never shed a tear' and hence not appreciating the 'slow soft flakes, salt tasting with tears' that 'fal[l] in [Virginia's] heart'.[145] She responded, '[y]ou sound very happy

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[140] See Christine Froula, 'Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 1 (1986), 63—90. Froula outlines how Virginia evolves the caterpillar-chrysalis-butterfly imagery from depicting female initiation patterns into symbols of her own artistic and creative powers. The struggles of a caterpillar are numerous and various, but unlike Vanessa's worm, it contains within itself its transformative destiny.

[141] Vanessa Bell, *The Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. by Regina Marler (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), p.175, 205. Hereafter '*Selected Letters*'.

[142] *Letters*, II, p.232. See Chapter 3, p.149.

[143] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 25 April 1918. Emphasis original.
After reading *Night and Day*, Vanessa did in fact react rather personally by admitting to Virginia that it gave her 'the horrors' of their 'particular Hell'—to Virginia's surprise (*Letters*, II, p.393).

[144] *Selected Letters*, p.275. See Virginia Woolf and Quentin Bell, *The Charleston Bulletin Supplements*, ed. by Claudia Olk (London: The British Library, 2013), pp.19—34.

[145] *Letters*, IV, p.40.

[...] What more do you want?', reminding her sister that her imaginations ought indeed to be taken with a pinch of salt: 'I'm sure you enjoy thinking of us far more than seeing us because then you can make us all do what is really characteristic of us instead of so often failing.'[146] Vanessa repeatedly expressed the concern that for Virginia, her characters were more real than the people they were modelled on, and generally Vanessa adopted a chilly, ironic attitude towards these characters in order to remain aloof, which encourages me to consider the created characters critically.

However, as an act of sistering – as a conscious, imaginative fashioning of their sisterly relationship – Virginia's writing had an impact on Vanessa and their lived relationship. Writing's influential power is hinted at in the sisters' correspondence, itself an example of writing as sistering. Throughout, their letters are marked by an animal code, which was imitated in the sisters' other intimate correspondences. In their salutations and signatures, Virginia was Billy (from billygoat) or Ape (aka Singe) – which would turn into more Apes or Singes – and Vanessa was Dolphin. This language was impossible for outsiders to understand – 'You puzzled the poor woman by your message about the Apes & I couldnt explain it!' – and so confirmed and reproduced their particular intimacy.[147] A few years after the Bells' marriage, the sisters became reflective about their letter-writing: Vanessa prompted 'Billy' to 'know just how to suit my taste in letters. I am greedy for compliments and passion.'[148] As Lee observes, the relationship was then 'changed' 'by their discussion of how to write to each other'.[149] I would argue the writing always had this transformative force, evidenced by the fact that both were strongly stimulated by the other's letters during periods of mental illness.[150]

There are differing accounts of how true-to-life the sisters' correspondence was; asking why Virginia was being melancholy, Vanessa speculated that she would not have received an answer '[i]f I asked you that face to face' but thought that 'when you set pen to paper, perhaps truth will out', suggesting that their letters might contain truths not voiced in conversations.[151] Virginia, though, underlined the performative nature of her writing: '[W]riting seems to me a queer thing. It does make a difference. I should never talk to you

[146] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 17 April 1929.
[147] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 5 August 1910.
[148] *Selected Letters*, p.71.
[149] Lee, p.251.
[150] It is worth noting that Virginia's doctor instructed Vanessa to only write to her once or twice a week a few days after she had written the letter discussed on pp.32—33. In a letter written in August 1911 (see Spalding, pp.94—8 for this period), Vanessa declares being 'distressed' by Virginia's letter and directly notes that her doctor 'Craig did say that agitating talks were very bad for me just now', sounding very agitated indeed about the possibility of Virginia not visiting her (NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 4 August 1911).
[151] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 18 August 1908.

like this.'[152] However the sisters talked, the writing, both their letters and Virginia's prose, certainly 'ma[d]e a difference' and was 'a queer thing' in a number of ways. Letters to Vanessa were also a site of experimentation and discovery for Virginia, who declared that '[t]he truth is we are too intimate for letter writing', but believed that 'if I ever find a form that does suit you, I shall produce some of my finest work. As it is, I am either too formal, or too feverish.'[153] As I hope to show, it is hardly a coincidence that similar accusations have been made of much of the early work that is discussed in Chapters 1—3 and that indeed searched for a form to suit Virginia's vision of Vanessa.

As my primary texts I have chosen 'Phyllis and Rosamond' (1906), 'Reminiscences' (1907), *The Voyage Out* (1915) (and *Melymbrosia*), *Night and Day* (1919), and *Flush* (1933), because, due to their fictionally reiterating the sisters' herstory and sharing autobiographical origins in Virginia's special intimacy with her sister and her fear of losing it, they provide examples of aspects of sistering which are under-acknowledged and at times even controversial. The two early shorter pieces provide a framework for linking fictionalised and biographical writing to sistering, and the novels have been chosen following the tradition of identifying Helen Ambrose and Katharine Hilbery as portraits of Vanessa and biographers' readings of *Flush* as a rendition of the triangular relationship between the Bells and Virginia. I will not discuss Mrs Ramsay or Susan of *The Waves* (1931) at length partly because I am motivated by a desire to try and differentiate Vanessa and Julia, sister and mother, and since Mrs Ramsay and Susan depict Vanessa as a mother, they have less to contribute to a discussion concentrated on sisters. However, the inevitable blurring of maternal and sororal identities is discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Moreover, my choice of primary texts is a feminist gesture prompted by Wallace's claim that female homosociality excludes texts from the canon. *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day* and *Flush* have conventionally been Woolf's least studied novels; besides the wish that my chosen focus will allow me to suggest meaningful, new ways of reading these texts, I am particularly wary of the canonical status of *To the Lighthouse* in light of the links Wallace observes between female homosociality and non-canonicity. I omit *To The Lighthouse* to signal the necessity of moving the conversation away from the kind of auto/biographical interpretations most prevalent in the novel's study. Understandably, and with ample autobiographical evidence—'It is perfectly true that [my mother] obsessed me', Woolf wrote[154]—*To the Lighthouse* has centered, and been the centre of, readings that prioritise

[152] *Letters*, I, p.408.
[153] *Letters*, I, p.343.
[154] 'Sketch of the Past', p.92.

motherhood and heterosexual marriage.[155] Like the novel, these topics are heavily canonised, even within feminist criticism, in comparison to more obscure sisterhood. The patriarchal family structure in *To the Lighthouse* centres masculine kinship experiences—the patriarch, Mr Ramsay, is the object of most familial attentions, and the plot-driving intergenerational divide is one between father and son—which marginalises familial female roles. Mrs Ramsay is not an active figure of female homosociality: her motherhood is filtered and defined through patriarchy, and Lily's explicit longing for parity with Mrs Ramsay only surfaces after it has become impossible. Opportunities for female homosociality are foreclosed by death and heterosexual marriage, even more so than in Woolf's early work. Consequently, at this point, I consider it important to vitalise the study of female kinship in Woolf's work by concentrating on lateral bonds and renditions of the sisters' herstory, as found in my primary texts. The time will hopefully come for a sisterly study of *To the Lighthouse*, but first we need to pay more undivided attention to texts that are more readily read as sororal, and as per Wallace's argument, non-canonical.[156] As Wallace asserts, 'sister bonds are both primary and powerful' and can therefore 'disrupt and collapse' the canon and 'offer another form of counterplotting.'[157] With this scheme in mind, I want to advocate for Woolf's early short prose, *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day* and *Flush* as worthy of research and to draw serious attention to the homosocial relationships that intersect the heterosexual romance plots and vocabularies in these narratives.

Chapter 1 explores 'Phyllis and Rosamond' and 'Reminiscences' as representations of the sisters' relationship. It emphasises the primacy of the sororal relationship, and contends that, beginning with these early creations, Virginia's writing actively 'sistered' Vanessa. Both texts are invested in active sistering by reproducing shared herstory and by longing for a sororal language in the shadow of patriarchy. They set out Virginia's attempts to textually negotiate her relationship with Vanessa and demonstrate her struggling with the idea of her sister's difference within their sameness. The chapter argues that Virginia's

[155] Despite the fact that some of the interpretations foregrounding motherhood and marriage, like those of Elizabeth Abel (1989), now appear outdated, they have influenced the ways in which *To the Lighthouse* continues to be read. Ilona Bell's '"Haunted by Great Ghosts": Virginia Woolf and *To the Lighthouse*' (1986) still offers a useful overview of the autobiographical parental influences; Brenda Silver's 'Mothers, Daughters, Mrs. Ramsay: Reflections' (2009) provides a refreshingly critical take on Mrs Ramsay's madonnaesque sanctity, but maintains the focus on vertical kinship.

[156] Like my present primary texts, *To the Lighthouse* mixes and disperses familial female roles and identities between its two main female characters, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Both may be seen as composite portraits: Mrs Ramsay, like Helen Ambrose, mixes aspects of Julia Stephen and Vanessa, and Lily incorporates Vanessa's profession with much of Virginia's character. I consider the painter a self-portrait, although she has been read as one of Vanessa's 'guise[s]' (Goldman [2001], p.149; see also Gillespie, p.108; Curtis [2002], p.76).

[157] Wallace, p.8.

deliberations on her affinity with and distance from her sister are found at the roots of her early ventures into both fiction and biography.

Difference is very much at the heart of **Chapter 2**, in which I read *The Voyage Out* and *Melymbrosia* as realising some of Virginia's feelings of sororal eroticism and violence. Butler's contention that kinship is defined by the possibility of rupture and Mitchell's assertion that siblingship involves erotic and violent impulses towards the same person offer insights to the deeply ambivalent relationship between the characters inspired by the sisters, Rachel Vinrace and Helen Ambrose. This chapter therefore offers a tangible demonstration of how sistering may be realised and performed in writing, even in a fictional guise.

In **Chapter 3**, I read Katharine Hilbery of *Night and Day* as Virginia's most extensive fictionalised portrait of Vanessa. I take as my point-of-departure Virginia's dedication of the novel to her sister, which explicitly links her with inexpressibility. While Virginia inherits from the Bloomsbury Group a version of the Katharine character which is essentialist, hers instead embraces a multiplicity and openness which reflect the complexity of Vanessa's character. This chapter is interested in what it means to portray a sister in a fictional character and what possibilities the fictionality opens both for the relevant writerly concerns – such as characterisation – and for the sister relationship itself.

Chapter 4 broadens this thesis' involvement with figurations of lateral kinship to animals, who are natural participants in the horizontal metaphorics of kinship, as the sisters' use of animal names implies.[158] I read *Flush* as a revisiting of the sisters' herstory and an exploration of Virginia's matured vision of their intimacy, suggesting how an evolving sister relationship contributes to wider ideas of relationality. I use central concepts from animal theory to demonstrate how the dog biography succeeds not only in coming to terms with but also in celebrating difference within sameness and so embraces kinship that is willingly lateral and pluralistic.

On a day in mid-April 1905, as Virginia was travelling in Spain with Adrian, she received a letter from her sister, addressing her as 'Beloved William and Wombat'.[159] Vanessa divined Virginia would be 'pining for a real petting by the time you get back', and teasingly suggested that 'if you have been good—There's no saying but you may get it.' Vanessa humorously hinted she could continue writing in this amorous vein, alas 'I keep on thinking that your letter will probably be read by Spanish officials which restrains my

[158] See Maud Ellmann, 'Chapter 18. Psychoanalytic Animal', in *A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture*, ed. by Laura Marcus and Ankhi Mukherjee (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp.328—350 (329).
[159] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 13 April 1905.

otherwise demonstrative pen.' This offers us an opportunity to emphasise the sisters' reciprocity in the textual creation of their relationship. However, for better or for worse, it was mostly the formulations of Virginia's, rather than Vanessa's, 'demonstrative pen' which performed the sisterhood and to which we will now turn. I like the image of the 'demonstrative pen': it suggests writing that both shows and enacts. It might even rebel. These demonstrations bring to us an increased awareness of women's relationships among themselves and make visible the deep-cutting influence of sisterly lives. They will, I hope, explicate the specificity of the sororal relationship and its impact on art and life and, by construing writing as sistering, enrich our understanding of how we do sisters.

CHAPTER 1. THE FOUNDATION OF SISTERHOOD: 'THE OTHER HELD POSSIBILITIES'

This chapter examines two early texts by Virginia Stephen, the short-story 'Phyllis and Rosamond' (1906) and the memoir 'Reminiscences' (1907), which demonstrate that sisterhood and its challenges were fundamental to her writing from the beginning. 'Phyllis and Rosamond' is the earliest indication of Virginia's (auto)biographical tendency to fictionalise Vanessa's character and their relationship. I read both texts as examples of 'rewriting' family scripts: they benefit from the unfixed definitions of what sisters are and do, and they rely on the resulting pluralistic identities. In addition to questioning the underlying Oedipal structures of family narrative, 'rewriting' suggests the possibility of improving and enhancing, which is exploited in both texts. The fictionality of 'Phyllis and Rosamond', and the supposedly characteristic silence of Vanessa as the subject of 'Reminiscences', ensure the power of Virginia's work not only as family records but also as texts that actively sister Vanessa, producing versions of her identity.

I begin by thinking about the possibilities for sororal space in the Stephens' re-organisation of their familial lives and their aesthetics, as they moved to Bloomsbury in 1904. The new, laterally-oriented home was shaped against their childhood one, for, as Virginia writes, 'its shadow falls across it. 46 Gordon Square could never have meant what it did had not 22 Hyde Park Gate preceded it.'[1] This escape from patriarchy freed both sisters' artistic practices, as is demonstrated by the parallels between Vanessa's decorative work and Virginia's 'Phyllis and Rosamond'. I interpret the short-story's sisters and their relationships with reference to Mauthner's concept of sistering, which involves talking and silences as well as groping for a sororal language. As a rejection of the hierarchically organised family with the father at top and daughters at bottom, sisterhood can, most importantly, motion towards horizontal alterity characterised by plurality and seriality. But accepting difference within sameness is challenging, as we will see by interrogating the characters of 'Phyllis and Rosamond' and the narrator of 'Reminiscences'. This chapter, then, begins to outline Virginia's imaginary in portraits of her sister and promotes a way of thinking about her writing and textual practice as acts of sistering, and explores her struggles with the idea of the sister's difference.

[1] 'Old Bloomsbury', p.44.

DEATH OF THE FATHER

Leslie Stephen died in February 1904, leaving the four Stephen siblings, in their early twenties, parentless. In the autumn of the same year, Vanessa orchestrated her family's relocation from 22 Hyde Park Gate in Kensington to their new Bloomsbury address, 46 Gordon Square. The Stephens' Kensington and Chelsea connections resisted the plan, and Spalding suggests this attitude influenced Vanessa's decision: 'there was little to attach her to Bloomsbury, except the fact that none of her relatives or old family friends lived there.'[2] Garnett echoes this by describing the move as a 'momentous change inspired by the necessity to separate herself from the past and discover a new independence from family ties that were no longer relevant.'[3] Certainly, the move, enabled by Leslie's death, increased the distance between the Stephens and their old 'family ties'. After the father's presence had for decades defined the Kensington home, his death freed the remaining Stephens to re-organise the physical and imaginative social and domestic spaces.

Vanessa's decision to distance herself and her siblings from the Kensington world was both a social and an aesthetic choice. Spalding's assessment that '[t]he chief outlet for her creativity that autumn was the decoration of the new house', permits my consideration of the house as Vanessa's primary artistic project at the time.[4] In one of her Memoir Club contributions, Vanessa recalls the move with ample visual and spatial detail:

> It seemed as if in every way we were making a new beginning in the tall, clean, rather frigid rooms, heated only by coal fires in the old-fashioned open fireplaces. It *was* a bit cold perhaps, but it was exhilarating to have left the house in which had been so much gloom and depression, to have come to these white walls, large windows opening on to trees and lawns, to have one's own rooms, be master of one's own time, have all the things in fact which come as a matter of course to many of the young today but so seldom then, to young women at least.[5]

Vanessa's memories of the new domestic setting and the importance of mastering one's 'own rooms' and time map precisely onto Virginia's recollections of Gordon Square; both sisters also recall Hyde Park Gate as a house of 'gloom and depression'. By pointing to the marked relationship between spatial organisation and the daughters at (someone else's) home,

[2] Spalding, p.43.
[3] Garnett (1997), loc115.
[4] Spalding, p.46. Hardly any of Vanessa's early paintings have survived.
[5] *Sketches*, loc1044.

Vanessa attests that the move was particularly significant to 'young women'—herself and Virginia. The father's death, then, opened new possibilities in organising space that was now their own.

A look at Vanessa's aesthetic and social arrangement of their new home aligns her authoring of the newly laterally-composed family life with Virginia's autobiografictional reproductions of the personal history the sisters shared, or herstory. Kuba observes that herstory, or sisters' experience of the relationship so far 'for[m] the next component of the women's experience' – as we see in Virginia and Vanessa's imaginations of this new phase of their lives – and that 'perceptions of shared herstory' support the emergence of sister identity.[6] Repeating and confirming their shared herstory was an essential part of the Stephens' sistering and notably pronounced already in their early works. Indeed, the sororal aspect in Vanessa's designing process was remarkable: as she was setting up the new home, she was also writing to her sister more or less daily.[7] In her letters, descriptions of the fresh decorations – for example, details of clashing carpet colours – are accompanied by constant tender fussing over her 'poor little monkey', whose arrival at home Vanessa looked forward to with gusto: 'It's really rather lonely here as I am generally alone [...] It will be very nice when you & I have luncheons and dinners alone in our little white dining room.'[8] Gordon Square was being set up for all four Stephens, of course, but its new freedom was felt especially by the sisters.

Some of the first things a visitor at Gordon Square would have seen were the portraits of Leslie and Julia Stephen by G.F. Watts. Watts, who died in July 1904, is another patriarchal figure from the Stephens' past, and Vanessa's treatment of his work between 1903 and 1905 exemplifies her simultaneous rejection and use of Victorian aesthetic frames. In 1903, visiting Watts, Vanessa wrote a long letter to her painter friend Margery Snowden, reciting his 'sayings about Art' and contrasting her own ideas against those of the Victorian.[9] Vanessa directly comments on Watts' ideas – he firmly believed that art should be symbolic or allegorical – only very briefly: 'I don't know that they really come to much and perhaps they will only bore you.' To Vanessa the great Victorian seemed dated: she describes him as 'a very kind old gentleman'; he has 'long—and I think most comical—talks with Georgie [George Duckworth] on the future of the Empire.' In her estimation, neither 'knows much about it'. Besides his plans for Art and Empire, Watts

[6] Kuba, p.36, 206.
[7] Virginia was still away recovering from her breakdown that followed the siblings' holiday after their father's death.
[8] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 28 October 1904; NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 1 November 1904.
[9] *Selected Letters*, p.10. Further references in this paragraph are to this page.

appears to know a thing or two about education: he has given George his 'notes on Education', which are 'written chiefly as he is getting out of his bath'. This 'explains the sort of thing they are', Vanessa concludes.

Vanessa's critical attitude towards Watts turned into straightforward rejection during the first winter in Bloomsbury. There was a memorial exhibition of the late painter's work at the Royal Academy, which Vanessa visited repeatedly. Virginia remembers one of these visits: 'the Watts show is *atrocious*; my last illusion is gone. Nessa and I walked through the rooms, almost in tears. Some of his work indeed most of it—is quite childlike.'[10] The gallery-visit sounds like a funeral procession, and describes seeing the painter's work in a realistic light for the first time. The shattering of the illusion of greatness moved the sisters to tears, but it also sparked action: Vanessa wrote an article on the exhibition; although the *Saturday Review* rejected it, she was willing to make a public break between herself and Watts. Spalding assesses Vanessa's reaction: Watts 'had become associated in her mind with the repressive past from which she was now determined to escape.'[11]

Watts was, however, also part of mourning for their parents, and this explains why one of the first things Vanessa did at Gordon Square was to rehang Watts' portraits of them.

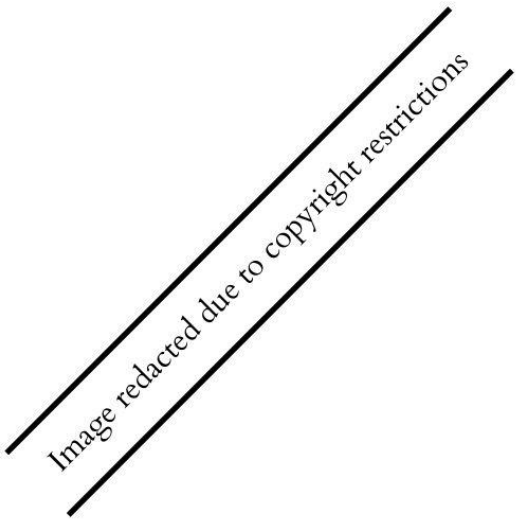

Figure 2. G.F. Watts, *Sir Leslie Stephen* (1878).

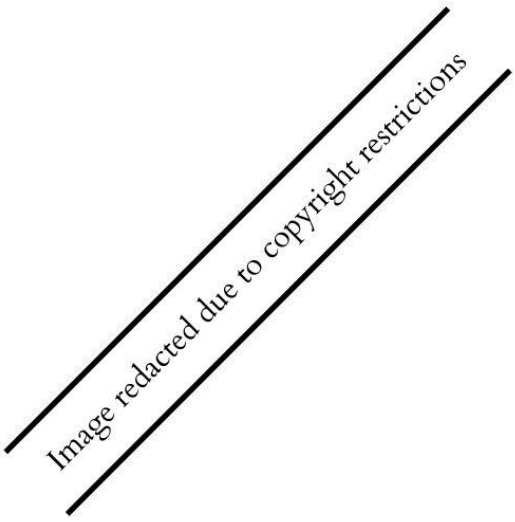

Figure 1. G.F. Watts, *Julia Stephen* (c.1870).

They added a touch of the familiar Kensington air of propriety, but it was primarily Vanessa's familial feeling which excused these particular paintings. She wrote to Snow: 'I think your remark about the portrait of Father by Watts being better than one by Sargent

[10] *Letters*, I, p.174. Emphasis original.
[11] Spalding, p.2.

could be is most likely true'.[12] Vanessa is even willing to prefer the portrait to the work of Sargent– whom she then admired greatly – and we can see Vanessa convincing herself of the portrait's worth: Vanessa promotes the validity of the praise from 'could be' to 'is', as she writes. She adds that 'I think it's finer than any now on show': Watts was at his best, according to Vanessa, painting Leslie's portrait.[13] Whether the portrait is an accomplishment or not, Vanessa's opinion of Watts and what he represented appears incongruous and fluctuating because of the two positions she was trying to occupy at once: the young artist with her own ideas unlike those of the great men of the past, and the young woman, left parentless at the age of 25, who needed to mourn the personal loss.

'INTO DAYLIGHT FROM DARKNESS'

The choices Vanessa made in the interior decoration of Gordon Square reflect both her eagerness for the new and the compromises she made with the old. She sought change after the heaviness of material and colour schemes in Kensington, and was greatly inspired by the artist Charles Furse. Spalding assesses the immediacy and strength of his influence on Vanessa's taste in interior decoration:

> Used to the sombre gloom of Hyde Park Gate, she was shocked at Yockley to see faces silhouetted against bare light walls. The house had been built for Furse by the architect Reginald Blomfield, and the distempered walls, in keeping with the 'artistic' taste of the day, had been deliberately kept uncluttered of everything, except for a few carefully chosen paintings and prints. The house seemed airy and expansive. To Vanessa, it was as if someone had lifted a blind in a previously darkened room.[14]

Especially faces silhouetted against the white made a deep impression on Vanessa. She contrasts Yockley's 'bare plaster walls and faces seen against them' with a scene she witnessed daily in Kensington: 'At dinner in the evening faces loomed out of the surrounding shade like Rembrandt portraits.'[15] Furse's interior design appears as a complete opposite to that of Hyde Park Gate; instead of being engulfed in shadows, the faces become highlighted by their light background. Giachero observes that there is a visual similarity between this recollection of family meals and one of Vanessa's few survived early paintings,

[12] *Selected Letters*, p.29.
[13] *Selected Letters*, p.29.
[14] Spalding, p.37.
[15] *Sketches*, loc883.

a portrait of her father, 'painted in the style of Rembrandt' and, in Giachero's estimation, 'no more than the work of an Academy student'.[16] Without having seen the portrait, we can deduce that the dark of her home – she remembers the walls having been 'absorbent of light'[17] – overshadowed her early work quite literally.

Impressed with Furse's light aesthetic, Vanessa produced similar effects in decorating Gordon Square. Most of the Kensington furniture and decorations were sold, but the remaining few – such as the 'Watts pictures, Dutch cabinets, blue china – shone out for the first time'.[18] Vanessa used the pale walls to pop out the colours of her new acquisitions – a red carpet in the drawing-room, green-and-white chintzes – as well as some inherited family objects, such as coloured Indian shawls, which, in her eye, now 'look[ed] rather fine and barbaric against our white walls.'[19] The general gloom of Hyde Park Gate was banished, but some of its aesthetic elements were brought out in new ways, against a lighter background. Her decorative choices simultaneously emphasise the contrasts – strong colours against white – and the fusions of different elements – old and new – and this paradoxical (im)balance would remain an element of her domesticity in the years to come.

A few things stand out in the sisters' memoirs of their first Bloomsbury home as they compare it to Kensington: spaciousness, increased noise, the surrounding greenery, and lights. Vanessa describes the move from Hyde Park Gate to Gordon Square 'as if one had stepped suddenly into daylight from darkness.'[20] Giachero warns against labelling the rhetoric 'artificial' and emphasises that 'for Vanessa the meaning of the expression was literal, as much as symbolic.'[21] Like the sunlight, the green of the squares seemed to flood into their home: Virginia describes to Violet Dickinson their habit of sitting on the balcony and watching 'the servant girls giggling with waiters in the shade of the trees' and declares, '[r]eally Gordon Square with the lamps lit and the light on the green is a romantic place.'[22] Here too, light and green announce an aesthetic awakening and are simultaneously associated with freer social conduct.

For Vanessa, the first two years in Bloomsbury were a period of immense artistic activity: she was painting more than ever and experimenting with new possibilities. The new vitality Vanessa brought to her work can be seen in her considerations of colour. In autumn 1903, Sargent had criticised Vanessa's work for being generally 'too grey', but

[16] Lia Giachero, 'To Daylight from Darkness,' in *Sketches*, loc1777.
[17] *Sketches*, loc734.
[18] 'Old Bloomsbury', p.46.
[19] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 29? October 1904.
[20] Quoted in Spalding, p.49.
[21] Giachero, loc1773.
[22] *Letters*, I, p.197.

already in spring 1904, as the Stephens travelled in Italy and France after their father's death, colour became an increasingly prominent preoccupation in her letters to Snow.[23] Vanessa is energised and confident enough to make suggestions for Snow's painting: discussing a portrait of a Mrs Tatham, Vanessa gives Snow rather specific recommendations concerning the colours: 'I think it would be very nice to keep her quiet and black and grey and have a red curtain, but you must get exactly the right red.'[24] This vision appears to have been strong enough to have influenced the choices she made in her first exhibited painting, a portrait of Nelly Cecil.

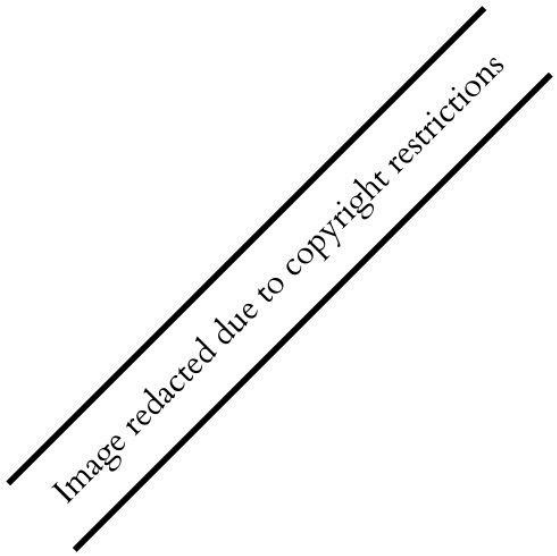

Figure 3. Vanessa Stephen, *Lady Robert Cecil* (1905).

In the portrait, Lady Robert Cecil appears indeed very 'quiet' amongst 'black and grey' and a brightly coloured curtain—green instead of red. Red is used elsewhere in small amounts to accentuate the blacks, particularly in the sitter's dark, disconsolate look. The green and red emphasise the black in Nelly's figure with urgency that is sharpened by noting that 'quiet' was in her case literal: when the portrait was painted, Nelly had been deaf for over a decade. Uncannily, this solemn portrait of a silenced woman uses colour to emphasise the two things, which to Vanessa 'seem ⁅...⁆ to have been the chief characteristics of the house in Hyde Park Gate': '⁅d⁆arkness and silence'.[25] Vanessa was discovering how to use colour to communicate emotional intensity; a related vehemence can be sensed in her working habits during the siblings' holiday in Cornwall in August 1905. Her new expressive, colour-concentrated method enabled her to paint over the old life and to challenge the

[23] *Selected Letters*, p.11.
[24] *Selected Letters*, p.17.
[25] *Sketches*, loc878.

predominance of the monochrome in her craft. Her work from this period has not survived, but her method, as described by her sister and implied in her own explanations of 'my kind of painting', was invigorated by a new vivacity and a kind of ruthlessness.[26]

True to her later pronouncement that 'colour reveals space', Vanessa's transforming aesthetic sense busied itself with colour and space; in fact, the work of both sisters manifests an appreciation of expansiveness.[27] In Venice, Vanessa's sensuality caught on to colour and expanding space. In particular Tintoretto excited Vanessa; her attempts to describe his pictures swell with words of scale: 'They are simply gorgeous. Tintoretto is the greatest. [...] all the churches and galleries are full of him. His finest pictures are enormous things.'[28] It was therefore no surprise that spaciousness became one of the things Vanessa – and Virginia – adored about Bloomsbury. Gordon Square came with more space: not only was Hyde Park Gate's upstairs/downstairs divide abolished, but there was space enough for the sisters to have their own bedrooms as well as sitting-rooms. Vanessa directly associates this change with freedom: 'on the whole all that seemed to matter was that at last we were free, had rooms of our own and space in which to be alone or to work or to see our friends.'[29] For Vanessa's generation – to herself and her siblings – the gain in personal space was a definitive element in their liberation, and she depicted the change through an image of movement, a sudden step from darkness to light.

ROOM AND FREEDOM

Having considered Vanessa's reorganisation of domestic space, I turn to Virginia's 'Phyllis and Rosamond', which sisters by reproducing and confirming Virginia and Vanessa's version of their family history. By sharing this herstory, Vanessa's domestic aesthetics and Virginia's short-story perpetuate their bond and invest in imagining sororal space as an alternative to patriarchy. In 'Phyllis and Rosamond', too, light symbolises revelation or new knowledge, and already the first page signals the story's aim of enacting a change from darkness to light; it commits itself to modelling 'those many women who cluster in the shade' and increasing 'the partial light which novelists and historians have begun to cast upon that dark and crowded place behind the scenes'.[30] By drawing 'these obscure figures' into the light, 'Phyllis and Rosamond' enacts a movement similar to Vanessa's step from

[26] *Selected Letters*, p.35.
[27] *Sketches*, loc1635.
[28] *Selected Letters*, p.13.
[29] Quoted in Spalding, p.49.
[30] Virginia Woolf, 'Phyllis and Rosamond', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick, 2nd edn (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1989), pp.17—29 (17). Further references will appear in the body text.

darkness into daylight. Early on, the short-story introduces another image of light, namely the sisters' 'bedroom candle', over which the sisters extrapolate their gains and losses in the marriage-game (18). This candle, and the sororal exchanges it stands for, is the only spot of light in the sisters' life, described as "a Black Hole" by Sylvia Tristram (28). These early light symbols link the pair of sisters with mobile, insurgent potential.

But first, the importance of (not) having a room of one's own is impressed upon the reader. The Hibberts' house is 'great ⌜and⌝ ugly' (19)—as Heather Levy notes, there is space enough to have a separate breakfast-room, but the 'sisters have not been assigned a social space'.[31] The drawing-room is a site of work and performance for them, the school-room is shared by the five sisters, and Phyllis and Rosamond share a 'moderate sized' bedroom; in other words, they are never alone.[32] The sisters have nowhere to meet their friends; the Tristrams, by contrast, just have an unspecified 'room' where they host theirs (24). Phyllis explains to Sylvia why they could never invite people over: "We haven't a room, for one thing: and then we should never be allowed to do it. We are daughters, until we become married women." (27) 'Phyllis and Rosamond' already argues for the significance of 'a room of one's own': even more than education or other privileges, Virginia suggests, the decisive thing is to have one's own space. As daughters, the sisters are trapped in the Oedipal hierarchy: it allows no lateral relationships other than those that might lead to marriage, which is really just a variant of their position as daughters-at-home. The short-story acutely renders the conditions Vanessa and Virginia lived in during their 'Greek slave years' and ends leaving the Hibberts in their "Black Hole", exhibiting the desperate powerlessness of their situation.[33]

The Stephen sisters' experience of expansion was not limited to more rooms; the world outside also grew larger and more accessible. Soon after Virginia joined her siblings at Gordon Square, she began street-haunting – as well as cab-hailing – in the company of Vanessa's sheepdog Gurth. The sisters often rode omnibuses together; Virginia records one of their adventures – not unlike Elizabeth Dalloway's – with excitement: 'valiantly, as though plunging into a cold bath, N. and I went off, on top of a bus, to take the air.'[34]

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[31] Heather Levy, *The Servants of Desire in Virginia Woolf* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p.36.
[32] In the published short-story, Dick mistakenly describes the bedroom as 'modest sized', but the manuscript shows that Virginia's word was 'moderate'; perhaps Dick's shrinking of the bedroom size can be taken as a sign of the story's affective atmosphere. Falmer, University of Sussex, The Keep, University of Sussex Special Collections, Monks House Papers, 'Wednesday June 20 – 23 1906 (Phyllis and Rosamund)' ⌜sic⌝, SxMs/18/2/A/23/F, ⌜p.3⌝.
[33] 'Sketch of the Past', p.115.
[34] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897—1909*, ed. by Mitchell Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1992), p.236.

Besides being 'extremely social', the young women enjoyed going about unchaperoned.[35] A similar possibility of liberation excites Phyllis, as she approaches Bloomsbury, where she speculates one could escape 'her lot' 'of a life trained to grow in an ugly pattern to match the staid ugliness of its fellows.' (24) Although the word 'theorise' which accompanies Phyllis's fantasy should alert us to its naivety, her positive impression of Bloomsbury is evident: relishing the cab's movement, she takes in the plenitude of space. The key difference between the Kensington pattern and Bloomsbury is the latter's allowance for growth: 'one might grow up as one liked.' The most important word in the passage of Phyllis's daydream, 'freedom', is passed by quickly, like a view from a cab's window, but it is surrounded by other striking words: 'room, [...] roar and splendour'. Noise is accompanied by lustrous visual observations. Phyllis believes that in these perceptions, she can 'read the live realities of the world [of Bloomsbury]', and whilst her romanticising must be viewed sceptically, her desire to participate in authentic lives and realities – or what in the short-story's vocabulary might be called 'truth' – is urgent and genuine. But she is aware of the impediment her ugly, patterned training is: 'her stucco and her pillars protec[t] her so completely' from what she imagines to be authentic life.

The sentences that follow this passage, and precede Phyllis's entrance to the Tristrams' party, further play with the image of tolerant Bloomsbury squares and highlight her desperation to participate in 'truth'. The first thing noted of the Tristrams' house is their windows: they are 'lighted' and 'open', and thus 'let some of the talk and life within spill out upon the pavement' (24). The picture of the protective and permissive 'umbrageous' space is rearticulated with the metaphor of 'spill[ing]': the nightly square is spilled, or spotted, with 'talk and life within'. Spilling suggests both paint and something to consume—like the cold water of intellectual conversation which Phyllis enjoyed previously, or something more intoxicating in the inviting party. She cannot wait for the door to be opened: the elated register of Christian mass, noted by Levy in 'let her enter, and partake', shows her mood borders on zealous.[36]

The Bloomsbury described in 'Phyllis and Rosamond' approximates a fantasy – not a reflection – of what Bloomsbury of 1904—6 could be. The new opportunities in living arrangements and art practices thrilled the Stephen sisters, and this enthusiasm lent its imagery and symbolism to the Hibberts' brief engagement with a world that was freer than theirs. 'Phyllis and Rosamond' reproduces some of the physical divides of the Stephens' Kensington home and their social implications, and generally adheres with the sisters'

[35] 'Old Bloomsbury', p.47.
[36] Levy, p.33.

conceptualisation of the worlds of Kensington and Bloomsbury as oppositional. Images of spotted light, amiable greens, and movement characterise the visual rendering of the imaginative space of Bloomsbury in the short-story, which juxtaposes a domestic organisation of vertical hierarchies of family (parents) and architecture (upstairs/downstairs) in Kensington with the Tristrams' very vaguely defined room that spills onto the world outside, in a hopeful vision of space, which enables women's personal and artistic growth, and of private sororal subversion that works towards such spaces.

'THIS STRANGE NEW POINT OF VIEW'

One of Vanessa's earliest memories of such supportive space is, perhaps surprisingly, of 22 Hyde Park Gate. Although she would, overwhelmingly, describe their childhood home as 'pitch-dark',[37] this passage demonstrates that there was, even then, a room she recalled through many of the images I have shown were used to depict Bloomsbury:

> Our happiest afternoons were spent in a small room handed over to us, opening out of the large double-drawing-room. It was a cheerful little room, almost entirely made of glass—with a skylight, windows all along one side, looking on to the back garden, another window cut in the wall between the little room and the drawing-room and a door, also a half-window, opening into the drawing-room. [...] From this room too we could spy on the grown-ups.[38]

The 'we' here refers to Vanessa herself and Virginia; the room is imbued with light and the good visibility '[f]rom' it is emphasised. Fittingly after this, Vanessa describes *The Hyde Park Gate News*, which reported the domestic goings-on from their point-of-view. More particular, though, was the perspective of the sisters 'spy[ing] on the grown-ups' from their shared room; in her sister, Vanessa had a companion, who, as Garnett recounts, 'offer[ed] the kind of consolation and relief of which she alone was capable' and shared her viewpoint.[39] To an extent, an alternative version of social and familial organisation in the shape of a sisterhood could exist *within* patriarchy. Superficially, there was nothing dissident in the young women's support of one another, but I venture that the core of the sister relationship is subversive and private, even secretive. Such subversive potential is explored

[37] *Sketches*, loc1029.
[38] *Sketches*, loc708—13.
[39] Garnett (1997), loc324.

in 'Phyllis and Rosamond', which portrays sorority as a secretive practice and as a horizontal alternative for social organisation. I will now discuss the short-story's representations of sistering and, in the course of the coming pages, consider what it means 'to sister' in this early vision of Virginia's.

'Phyllis and Rosamond' works out some of the strangeness of this new lateral perspective. The group under inspection are the 'many young women, born of well-to-do, respectable, official parents' (17). Their lives are scrutinised with an eye especially for their lateral relationships: sisterhood, friendships, and romantic possibilities. Such an exceptional perspective was encouraged by the unusual laterality of the Stephens' newly-arranged life, the 'romance' of which, Lee writes, 'lay largely in the removal of authority.' [40] The story compellingly considers lateral interaction simultaneously from two different positions: those of Kensington-based daughters at home, and Bloomsbury-dwelling independent young women. Maria DiBattista argues that 'Phyllis and Rosamond' is 'actively experimenting with the personally discomfiting but narratively rewarding effects of bilocation.'[41] Indeed, bilocation allows Virginia's narrator to switch between the different characters and experiences attributed to each of them in ways that, as I discuss later, test the nature of their sisterhood. In addition, it productively brings together the two geographically and socially different perspectives. The conversation between Sylvia Tristram and Phyllis Hibbert may appear unsuccessful, but this productive clash between diverse positions inspired the short-story and allowed Virginia insight into the experiences she shared with many women of her class.

Thus, the central conflict in 'Phyllis and Rosamond' emerges from the fact that the story represents a number of horizontal perspectives and pits these against each other. These positions reflect the author's experiences of escaping vertical familial oppression and attempting to look around herself, which come to underline the distinct perspectives of two sets of young women on love. A passage discussing proposals works towards recommending a stand which engages love horizontally. The Hibberts' most important moment of comprehension – after this scene they descend into silence – occurs when they hear Sylvia declare: "I have never yet had a proposal; I wonder what it feels like". (25) Phyllis and Rosamond momentarily hope they might have a home-ground advantage – they have received many proposals – until they realise that even marriage, their future profession, looks different to the Tristrams. Significantly, 'they could not adopt this strange new point

[40] Lee, p.207.
[41] Maria DiBattista, *Imagining Virginia Woolf: An Experiment in Critical Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.55.

of view, and their experiences after all were of a different quality entirely.' (25) The sisters can see that there is another point-of-view to take on marriage and love, and they even feel a vague sense of admiration for it, but their upbringing has corrupted them, and they are unable to adopt it.

Part of the revelation is the qualitative difference between the proposals made to them and those to the Tristrams. In June 1906, Virginia, like Sylvia, had not yet received any proposals, but Clive Bell had proposed to Vanessa, who had, robustly enough, rejected him. This experience is probably the basis of the imagined qualitative difference between the sorts of proposals they would have received serving tea in Kensington and using their 'brains soberly' in Bloomsbury (25). The two distinct points-of-view are contrasted to the effect of revealing the spurious nature of love in the Hibberts' experience. It is brought about by meretricious 'calculated actions' and set in public spaces, and, like the assonance and alliteration in 'glances of the eyes, flashes of the fan, and faltering suggestive accents' imply, the charms are practiced rhythmically—as in rehearsed choreography (25—6). This premediated love-making stands in stark contrast with '[l]ove here'. The vigour and strength propounded by the word 'robust' and the difference with feminine 'flashes of fan' add to the metaphor's masculinity. There is even a visual element to this love: it catches one's eye 'in the daylight', unlike the disembodied gestures in night-time balls. Most importantly, love in Bloomsbury is a 'thing', material that can be touched and examined.

Before this moment of revelation, Phyllis and Rosamond have considered love – or rather, marriage – a game, or a way to secure their false liberation within the patriarchal system of oppression they are caged in. '[T]his strange new point of view' claims that instead love is a matter of personal choice, and, what is more, it can be 'tapped and scrutinised' (25—6). The Hibberts have been taught to view love within the Oedipal structures that set the father/husband at the head of the family, but through the Tristrams they glimpse at a viewpoint that tries to examine it eye-to-eye, or laterally. This new perspective, then, recommends 'a paradigm shift' not unlike Mitchell's, which challenges understanding social life always 'through vertical paradigms'.[42] As Mitchell states, all lateral relations 'take their cue' from siblings; it is therefore logical that Virginia's first attempt to renegotiate married love is relayed by setting sisters vis-à-vis, proposing that it was a matter for lateral discussion.[43]

SECRET SISTERHOOD

[42] Mitchell, p.3.
[43] Mitchell, p.3.

'Phyllis and Rosamond' continues casting a 'partial light' on the lives of women, and it does this by describing an obscure relationship that is seldom the subject of either factual or fictional writing: the sororal bond (17). Sister relationships are frequently socially obscure, too: Mauthner calls sisterhood an often 'socially invisible tie', because 'relationships between biological sisters lack their own social institutions or representations in the public sphere'—the tie 'exists primarily in the private realm of domestic life with no language, public discourse or images of its own.'[44] Sisterhood is fundamental to the experiences Virginia records: it provides the initial structures through which the narrator approaches the characters, and it is the relationship explored with most nuance and depth. 'Phyllis and Rosamond' demonstrates many of the material aspects of sistering that Mauthner identifies in her analyses of sistering as something that 'women actively *do* [...] rather than passively experience'.[45] Significantly, sistering practices include shared lived experience, talking and engaging in dialogue; in Mauthner's understanding, 'sistering can be supportive and nurturing as well as beset by conflict and tensions'—both aspects manifest in 'Phyllis and Rosamond'.[46] Phyllis and Rosamond's special bond forms the emotional centre of the story, but their visit to Bloomsbury forces them to temporarily renegotiate definitions of sisterhood and seems to permanently upset their private dialogue.

The relationship between Phyllis and Rosamond is introduced as a contradiction to the observations of the drawing-room scene that precede it: it is the private truth which goes undetected in the public space where we first encounter the sisters. The young Misses Hibbert 'seem indigenous to the drawing-room', but this is a superficial pronouncement; more crucially the narrator begins to zoom into their private space: 'You must be in a position to follow these young ladies home, and to hear their comments over the bedroom candle.' (18) The sisters' shop-talk, 'calculat[ing] their profits and their losses', 'is not very edifying', the narrator notes. (19) Their best feature by far is their relationship:

> Yet you will observe also in this hour of unlovely candour something which is also very sincere, but by no means ugly. The sisters were frankly fond of each other. Their affection has taken the form for the most part of a free masonship which is anything but sentimental; all their hopes and fears are in common; but it is a genuine feeling, profound in spite of its prosaic exterior. (19)

[44] Mauthner, p.14.
[45] Mauthner, p.9.
[46] Mauthner, p.3.

The genuine bond is set up to contrast the disingenuous performance the sisters carry out in front of their parents and guests. The narrator specifies that the relationship is 'by no means ugly'; the adjective is used twice elsewhere in the story: just before this passage to describe the Hibbert's home as 'a great ugly house' and when Phyllis condemns the Kensington lifestyle as forcing her growth to conform to an 'ugly pattern' (19, 24). The sororal bond is clearly something unfitting to the Kensington milieu, where it is enacted in a barely-lit private bedroom and remains invisible in the other rooms of the family home. Virginia tries out some 'images of its own' to describe the sister relationship, such as the symbolic candle, but the story ends without providing viable alternatives to the candle-lit bedroom.[47] The connection the word 'ugly' creates between the scenes leaves us wondering whether this relationship might have blossomed more visibly in Bloomsbury and its spaces that accept and encourage autonomous love.

The idea of specifically-chosen connections in 'free masonship' links to the modern perception of kinship as a matter of choice. Mauthner cites a study by Firth et al, which noted 'that sister ties represented the choice element among kin ties where women could negotiate the type of interaction and quality of contact'.[48] This is typical of sister bonds presumably because there are no preconceived notions or constructed organisations to guide sistering practices in dominantly patriarchal cultures.[49] Tellingly, Virginia has to borrow the image of a highly patriarchal social institution – the freemasons – to describe a women's secret society.[50] The narrator explains the intimacy between Phyllis and Rosamond as the result of a chance occurrence of sympathetic minds: they are of similar 'frivolous, domestic, [...] lighter, and more sensitive temperaments' (18). They have voluntarily formed their close bond, and they act as if 'all their hopes and fears are in common' (19). This seems to be the case even in their marriage plans: considering whether she should marry Middleton, Phyllis assumes that Rosamond would "stay with us in Derbyshire" (22). The sisters, acting as a unit and sharing everything from their bedroom to future plans, consistently choose each other as their most intimate kin and even in the eventual, vertically-enforced separation via marriage, try to imagine ways to remain close.

This intricate description of the sororal bond is a distinctly autobiographical moment in its wishful 'rewriting' of a family script. The narrator readily defends the intense

[47] Mauthner, p.14.
[48] Mauthner, p.22.
[49] Mauthner, p.16.
[50] The Order of Women Freemasons, UK's oldest Masonic organisation for women, was formed in 1908. They still advertise 'Brotherly love' as a reason to join them. <https://www.owf.org.uk/> [accessed 26.2.2018]

intimacy: the relationship is supposedly not 'sentimental' and – we note the author's hopeful tone – in fact 'there is even something chivalrous in the attitude of the younger sister to the elder' (19). Virginia's wish-fulfilling description of the bond continues by declaring that the older sister accepts the younger sister's special attentions with thankful 'pathos'. This is one of the moments when, in an otherwise mature story, the author seems to use her fiction to indulge in fantasy-fulfilment: whilst the Stephen sisters certainly shared in 'a close conspiracy', there is little in their autobiographical writings to suggest that Virginia aimed to treat Vanessa especially well – at times the contrary appears truer – and even less to suggest Vanessa having been pathetically grateful for her little sister's behaviour. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the feeling of closeness and shared intimacy was genuine between the Stephens as it is between the Hibberts: in a life of superficiality and pretending, Phyllis and Rosamond's most praiseworthy characteristic is their ability to have, and the appreciation they show for, their sisterhood, which proves their capacity for genuine feeling.

The sisters' intimacy shares many qualities with figurations of queer kinship, often subjected to secrecy and which Weston qualifies as chosen. There is a sensuous element in the two women's connection that manifests itself in their physical relaxation as they 'are alone at last': 'they stretch their arms and begin to sigh with relief' (19).[51] These bodily descriptions relate the ease with which the sisters occupy space when alone. In addition, their silent synchronicity evidences their deep affection, which may, in my view, be labelled both idealising and candidly tender without eroticising it. The relationship has also been read as an erotic one, however; Levy delights in the 'lesbian possibility in the Hibbert sister's [sic] bedroom.'[52] Whilst Levy offers insights to links between space and intimacy, she undermines her own reading by, for example, imposing Vita Sackville-West on her idea of Sylvia.[53] There is, indeed, something secret in the sisters' 'free masonship', and the candle-lit room does call to mind Virginia's childhood memory of meeting her sister under the nursery-table – which, unlike Levy, I do not read as a recollection of 'erotic tenderness' – but eroticising this intimacy is unnecessary.[54] Unfortunately, this implicitly disqualifies homosocial intimacy when it is not sexual and leaves this relationship unrepresented and unexplored. Instead of eroticising the sister relationship, it is more fruitful to refer to the similarities with queer kinship in order to increase awareness of the

[51] For an analysis of this pose, see p.119.
[52] Levy, p.28.
[53] Levy, p.38. Virginia first met Vita in 1922.
[54] Levy, p.28.

permeability of the social structures that tend to disable all kinds of private, socially invisible and chosen kinships.

SISTERING: TALKING

Despite Phyllis and Rosamond's bodily intimacy, their primary method of sistering is talk. Mauthner observes the same practice in what she terms 'best friend sisters' and cites research demonstrating that '"relationshiping" or "doing" the "social ideology of intimacy" through talk illustrates how talking maintains social worlds.'[55] One such typically-gendered interaction style in close female friendships is so-called 'collaboration-oriented talk'.[56] These terms offer a way to analyse Phyllis and Rosamond, a prime example of 'best friend sisters' and their 'collaboration-oriented' conversations. The first private conversation between the sisters – assessing Phyllis's suitor Middleton – gives a vivid demonstration of how collaboratively they make decisions. Phyllis opens the topic by addressing her sister: "Well, my dear [...] what do we decide?" (22) The dialogue demonstrates many key aspects of female friendship talk: the sisters confide in each other, are demonstrative (addressing each other as 'my dear'), and provide help and advice—'Phyllis [...] would have accepted or rejected any man on the strength of her sister's advice' (22). Besides sharing problems, Mauthner explains, women's 'intimacy involves admitting dependency', or as Phyllis declares to Rosamond: "If it weren't for you, Rosamond, I should have married a dozen times already [...] I'm very weak without you."[57] (23) 'Best friend sisters', like Phyllis and Rosamond, both socialise together and 'spend a lot of time talking and analysing their lives, which creates intimacy'.[58] In addition to reiterating and producing their close relationship the sisters' talk defines the lens through which each of them – and the reader – interprets their life-events: because their decisions are made in these talks, we observe their lives being literally shaped by their dialogues.

Talking is a central part of practising friendship – indeed J. Coates attests that 'through talking we do "being friends"' – and it was the primary way in which the Bloomsbury Group, first and foremost 'a circle of intimate friends' according to Vanessa, was 'done'.[59] Bloomsbury is famous for frank conversation, and it is idealised for such talk in 'Phyllis and Rosamond': in Bloomsbury, love, as other topics of conversation, 'was a robust,

[55] Mauthner, p.27.
[56] Mauthner, p.28.
[57] Mauthner, p.28.
[58] Mauthner, p.34.
[59] Quoted in Mauthner, p.166; *Sketches*, loc2084, fn30.

ingenuous thing' (26). However, since in fact during 1904-6 some topics were still taboo, it appears that the model and origin of the famously-frank talk was something more familial than the Lytton Strachey-style semi-flirtatious jokes about semen.[60]

The social structure that formed the basis of the Group was the Stephen siblings' household: the Group came to existence by Thoby's Cambridge friends befriending his sisters, but long before its formation, Virginia wrote longingly of talking for lengths of time and on a variety of topics—with Vanessa. In October 1904, the recuperating Virginia wrote about Vanessa's 'delightful' visit: 'we talked the whole time'.[61] In April 1906, Virginia longs for Vanessa: 'I shall be very glad if Nessa does come; I want to talk for 10 hours without stopping.'[62] They discussed the personal – Virginia's health, for example, was a recurring though loathed topic – as well as general topics, which sounds like the first Thursday Evenings: 'Nessa and I have been arguing for six hours consecutively—which means generally that I lose my temper in some very remote cause—as for instance the Ethics of Empire (dont that sound grand).'[63] The eventual introduction of sex into the conversation between the men and women certainly widened the range of possible topics, but the lengthy, profound talks were not invented or solely practiced by the Group's men—long before the men and women could share a sexual joke, the sisters had been 'talk[ing] the whole time.'

The dialogue between Phyllis and Rosamond can continue even in silence and as such is a prominent demonstration of sororal subversion. Their ability to 'telegraph' their thoughts to each other through their eyes constitutes a language of their own. This alternative mode of communication is employed when they are engaged in performing their public duties:

> while [Rosamond's] lips murmured ohs and ahs of horror, her eyes were telegraphing across the table, 'I am doubtful.' If she had nodded her sister would have begun to practice those arts by which many proposals had been secured already. Rosamond, however, did not yet know enough to make up her mind. She telegraphed merely, 'Keep him in play.' (21)

The passage demonstrates the sisters' continuous leading of a double life: entertaining their guest is a duty for daughters at home, but Rosamond simultaneously engages in a private

[60] Famously, in 1907, Strachey pointed 'at a stain on Vanessa's white dress' and enquired 'Semen?' ('Old Bloomsbury', p.56)
[61] *Letters*, I, p.147.
[62] *Letters*, I, p.222.
[63] *Letters*, I, p.192.

communication with her sister about a different topic. The silent mode of communication is the more honest one – Virginia consistently associated both silence and honesty with the arts of the eye, or painting – an association which we have already encountered in Vanessa's portrait of Nelly Cecil and her silent, meaningful stare.

Since the sisters cannot voice their true thoughts, their private exchange becomes a subversive act. Andrea McNeil suggests that 'these two characters retreat to a subversive female sign language'.[64] Patricia Ondek Laurence, too, has analysed this kind of Kristevan silence in Woolf's female characters and argues, like McNeil, that the metalanguage – silent means of communication between the women – can be seen to demonstrate that the sisters possess some power and control of the marriage game.[65] McNeil continues by citing Barbara Johnson: 'Their silence is far from empty; it is instead "a sign of their self-presence and self-resistance: a source of insight and power rather than merely of powerlessness."'[66] The sisters can send each other short sentences – "I am doubtful", "Keep him in play" – that cover different kinds of uncertainty and ambivalence. Later, at the Tristrams', Rosamond silently communicates her discomfort to Phyllis 'across the room' (25). Their language is the result of necessity—in order to carry out their sistering practice of making decisions together, Phyllis and Rosamond have had to develop an alternative, private way of communicating, and have thus produced a further layer to their double act: paradoxically, their 'telegraphing' relies on the two of them being frank with each other and is carried out undercover in front of the objects of their comments, in secrecy and in plain sight.

So, Phyllis and Rosamond's acts of sistering motion towards an alternative way of organising social and familial life that is collaborative and laterally-oriented. Their sisterhood is represented as a kinship bond that is chosen, enacted and, due to its existence within patriarchy, secretive. It constitutes a privacy that is not based on the female-male-binary, although the modes of private sororal communication – heart-to-heart in a candle-lit bedroom, and an eye-to-eye silent telegraphing – have been formed around patriarchal oppression in both private and public spaces. 'To sister', then, for Phyllis and Rosamond means 'to talk': by talking the sisters create their intimacy and their alternative version of the social world they inhabit. Emphasising talking as the primary sistering act is hopeful, and it highlights the plurality of voices, but it likewise takes us towards examples of unsuccessful sistering in the short-story.

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[64] McNeil, Andrea, '"Moments of Being" Elizabeth Dalloway: A Study of Virginia Woolf's Daughter Figures', MA thesis, University of Ottawa, January 2002, <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/6363/1/MQ72781.PDF> [accessed 12.3.2020], p.16.
[65] McNeil, p.17.
[66] McNeil, p.17.

TOWARDS A PLURALITY: JULIAS

But before discussing the short-story's manifestation of the difficulties of sororal plurality, I return to the hallway of 46 Gordon Square. Even more prominently than the Watts portraits of their parents, Vanessa hung up two rows of photographs by their great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron, which according to Humm was 'Bell's first act' in the new home.[67] A row of eminent Victorian men (including Browning, Tennyson, Meredith and Darwin) was set up 'opposite a whole row of Mrs Cameron's best portraits of [Julia Stephen].'[68] A letter evidences that Vanessa made these decorative choices in view of Virginia's opinion: 'I hope you'll approve, but they can easily be taken down if you dont.'[69] She tells of the 'celebrities' photos and that 'on the opposite side I have put 5 of the best Aunt Julia photographs of Mother. They look very beautiful all together. You'll soon be here to see how it all looks.' Vanessa's first impression is one of beauty enhanced by the photographs' togetherness. The end of the letter highlights Vanessa's anticipation of seeing Virginia: 'Tomorrow at about 5 I shall walk in & I shall be very glad to see my monkey.' Vanessa's photographs were not only numerous and exhibited in rows, she was also eager for her sister to participate in this new domestic vision. This photographic arrangement may indeed be contrasted with her adolescent attempt to 'reform' the 'plush frames' of some family photographs at Hyde Park Gate: her secret revolution was quickly noticed by 'the literary powers' of the house (her father) and she was 'condemned as a heartless desecrator of the most sacred sentiments of family.'[70] At Gordon Square, Vanessa could finally enact a shift from such paternal monologism towards a more equal, pluralistic vision of kinship.

These photographs affirmed the Stephens' connection with the past century's literal and intellectual elite and drew attention to the fact that they were related to the virtuoso visual artist; the kinships were claimed on the grounds of both blood and social association. The photographs also gestured towards the two Julias' visual, European and matrilineal heritage. Vanessa's decision to present a whole row of her mother's portraits as a foil to the Victorian men both highlighted her kinswomen's artistic prowess and fed the myth of feminine beauty in the Pattle family. Virginia shared their father's opinion that '[t]he beautiful series of portraits taken by Mrs Cameron […] recall [Julia] like nothing else.'[71]

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[67] Humm, (2002), p.98.
[68] Spalding, p.46.
[69] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 1 November 1904.
[70] *Sketches*, loc1587—97.
[71] Leslie Stephen (1977) quoted in Humm (2002), p.67.

Vanessa's choice of such a prominent place of display suggests she concurred, as does her own work: in 1929 she painted one of Cameron's photographs of Julia (figures 6 and 7). The Dulwich Picture Gallery exhibition suggested that the painting may be considered as a partial self-portrait, as Julia seems to have taken on Vanessa-like features, such as her fuller lips.[72] It seems to have been Julia's family's shared opinion that she was best reproduced in the artwork of her aunt, a close female relative.

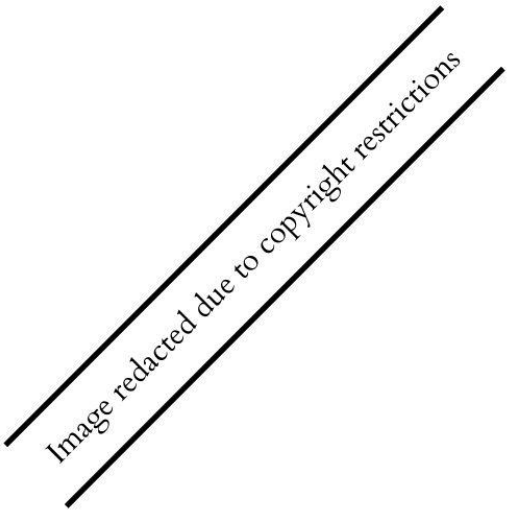

Figure 4. Julia Margaret Cameron, *'My Niece Julia, full face'* (1867).

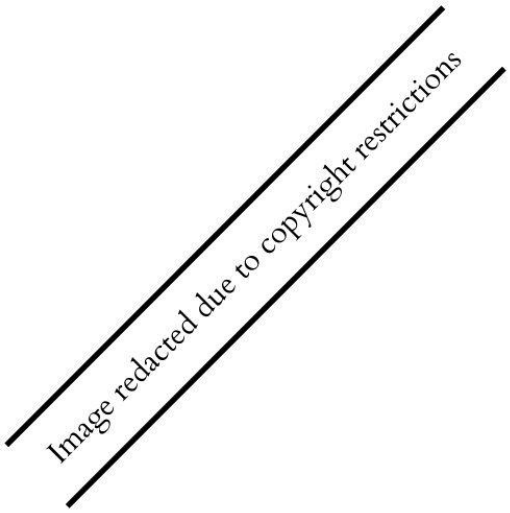

Figure 5. Julia Margaret Cameron, *My Favourite Picture of all my works, my Niece Julia (Jackson)* (1867).

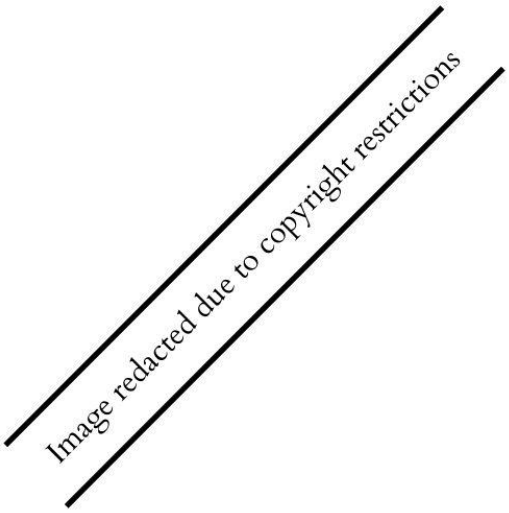

Figure 6. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Julia Jackson* (1864).

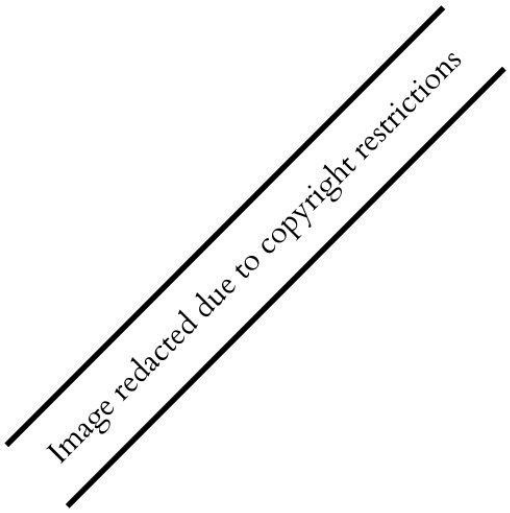

Figure 7. Vanessa Bell, *The Red Dress* (1929).

[72] museum label for Vanessa Bell, *The Red Dress* (1929), 'Vanessa Bell (1879—1961)', Dulwich Picture Gallery, 8 February—4 June 2017.

Cameron made over 20 photographic portraits of her niece, and it is not known which were the five favourites hung by Vanessa. The three I have provided are, respectively, Cameron's most exhibited photograph of Julia, her own personal favourite, and the one that inspired *The Red Dress*.[73] Garnett provides a useful summary of Julia '[s]een through the lens of her aunt's camera': she 'appears as either upright, statuesque and infinitely noble or as loose-haired, passionate and dionysiac. Extraordinarily different though they are, both manifestations are equally powerful, leading one to speculate about a personality that remains comparatively mysterious.'[74] Leaving Julia's personality aside, Garnett's remark about the portrayals being 'extraordinarily different' is accurate and brings to fore the photographs' pluralistic fruitfulness of simultaneous diversity, which must have been emphasised by being exhibited side by side.

I wish to invoke two kinds of seriality here, namely Mitchell's 'law of the mother' which 'introduces seriality laterally among her children', 'allowing space for one who is the same and different', and seriality that is particular to the photographic medium.[75] Discussing the significance of seriality in the sisters' photography, Humm points to Virginia's memory of photographing a bulldog called Simon and of her 'stag[ing] photographic seriality' already in 1897, by shooting Simon "6 times—on the chair with a coat and pipe, and lying on the ground".[76] This session is actually an early instance of the sisters' artistic collaboration – "We photographed Simon"; "Nessa and I developed in the night nursery" – and it certainly suggests the young Stephens' 'devotion to seriality' and their pleasure in the photographic possibility of repetition.[77] Seriality is, evidently, a conspicuous element of Gordon Square's exhibition of Julias: opposite to the row of individually portrayed men, this mother – who was, according to Virginia's reminiscences, never there enough – is reproduced again and again. This sense of uncanny seriality and simultaneity would have been heightened by the ethereal effect of Cameron's soft focus. So, while the Victorian photographs clearly acknowledge the Stephens' intellectual, masculine heritage, they also combine it with its apparent opposite and take ownership of the demonstrated familial feminine artistry in a manner that reproduces a haunting presence of simultaneity, seriality and sameness in art that involves multiple women from the same family, suggesting both the plurality and sisterliness of the new domestic order.

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[73] In another photograph, Julia wears a dress with a white lace collar that Virginia would later wear in her 1924 photoshoot for *Vogue*.
[74] Garnett (1997), loc260.
[75] Mitchell, p.52.
[76] Humm (2002), p.28.
[77] Humm (2002), p.28, 92.

Like Vanessa's decorations at Gordon Square, the formal properties of 'Phyllis and Rosamond' both use and refuse old structures—the mixing genres provide the story with an auspicious but difficult plurality. Leslie had started his youngest daughter on a path to become a historian, and during her early Bloomsbury years, this preoccupation was still prominent in Virginia's mind.[78] She had also been subjected to abundant examples of biographical writing: as Anna Snaith observes, 'Woolf's ancestors on the Stephen side handed down a tradition of male life-writing'.[79] After Leslie's death, Fred Maitland enlisted Virginia's help in preparing his biography, and she was driven to think about her father and his relationship to biography in two ways: as the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which had largely monopolised his (and their) life, and as a subject of study. Virginia was intimately familiar with the male traditions of auto/biography, especially when it came to her own family, and this awareness grounded what Snaith calls '[h]er ideas of newness'.[80]

The strong influence of the historical and biographical genres is easily detectable in 'Phyllis and Rosamond', perhaps explaining why some critics, like Dean Baldwin, have found it and other stories from 1906—9 only "exercise[s] in traditional methods, not explorations of new approaches".[81] On the other hand, feminist critics, like Nena Skrbic, have explored the story's deviations from traditional forms and argue that Woolf began her innovative formal experiments already here. Certainly, 'history and biography', and their limitations and purposes, provide her point-of-departure: both have failed to represent women. As Skrbic observes, in her earliest surviving attempt to portray lives of the obscure, Virginia is found standing 'vertiginously on the threshold of tradition and modernity, caught in an odd, intergenerational dichotomy.'[82]

Following Skrbic, I find that 'Phyllis and Rosamond' demonstrates a desire to resist some of the masculine, realist conventions that Virginia inherited. On one level, its aims are factual and historical: it is providing 'pictures of people', or 'a faithful outline, drawn with no skill but veracity'; this portrait is meant to benefit students of history and biography (17).

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[78] For example, in May 1905, she wrote Violet, 'I am going to write history one of these days' (*Letters*, I, p.190).
[79] Anna Snaith, '"A View of One's Own": Writing Women's Lives and the Early Short Stories', in *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction*, ed. by Kathryn Benzel and Ruth Hoberman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.125—138 (127).
[80] Snaith (2004), p.127.
[81] Quoted in Nena Skrbic, *Wild Outbursts of Freedom: Reading Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p.96.
[82] Skrbic, p.97.

The picture will also be sociologically representative: the narrator intends 'to look as steadily as we can at a little group' that 'epitomise[s] the qualities of many' (17). Using scientific phrases like 'the subject of special enquiry' and 'excellent material for our enquiry' to refer to the sisters under scrutiny emphasises the story's objective, observatory purpose (18). The investigation is anchored to a specific historical moment: it is 20 June 1906, and the sisters, 'in the slang of the century' may be called '"the daughters at home"' (17—8). However, despite the numerous applications of a historical, factual form, the story also claims its fictionality by declaring that the names 'Phyllis and Rosamond' are chosen at random (18). Virginia is already experimenting by mixing genres: how might fiction sit with biography or history?

In fact, 'Phyllis and Rosamond' brings history in touch with both fiction and autobiography. Recognising the story as a reworking of Virginia's experience of transition from Kensington to Bloomsbury, Snaith suggests that 'Woolf is both Phyllis and Rosamond, denied a formal education, existing as ornaments in the home, *as well as* the Miss Tristrams.'[83] The 'sociological and historical' confidence of the piece emerges from it being 'based on her own experience, but experience that she had reworked, transmuted, and spread among the various characters.'[84] The processes Snaith names – reworking, transmuting, and spreading – describe the tangled and multifaceted ways in which the short-story overlaps and reviews personal history. One of the deletions in the manuscript hints at the immediate intimacy of this experience: Virginia omitted the sentence 'Some part of this experience, at least, has been ours', perhaps because of its too-direct categorisability as autobiography.[85] Either way, the 'ours' of the narrative voice is a good reminder of the autobiographical plurality of Virginia and Vanessa's shared herstory.

DiBattista, too, recognises the story as a 'place to practice her fledgling art of novelistic self-projection.'[86] Assessing the connections between the characters and their creator, she writes: 'Each sister gives voice to a different aspect of her own mind, character, and opinions. Rosamond is perhaps the closest to Woolf's writing self'.[87] Yet, although Rosamond is a prototypical novelist, also Phyllis possesses something of Virginia's: she is a shrewd judge and her 'emotionalism anticipates the indignation that will animate Woolf's satires against the regime of the traditional drawing room'.[88] Moreover, there is much of

[83] Snaith (2004), p.130.
[84] Snaith (2004), p.130.
[85] Sussex, Monks House Papers, SxMs/18/2/A/23/F, [p.3]. This sentence came directly after the Hibberts' bedroom conference.
[86] DiBattista, p.52.
[87] DiBattista, p.52.
[88] DiBattista, p.52.

Vanessa in the more conventional Phyllis, who is the elder of the two sisters and the object of the younger one's special attentions. On top of this, Vanessa is the model of the host, the elder 'Miss Tristram, a young woman of great beauty, and artist of real promise' (25). These correspondences look forward to the question of whether or not Phyllis and Sylvia are sisters: perhaps they are not, being something even more intimate – the same person, both representing their author's experiences – or perhaps they are, Phyllis being a Vanessa-inspired elder sister, in dialogue with Sylvia, the younger sister like Virginia. As we will see, the negotiation of their kinship is left in ambivalence and confusion, and so are the characters' autobiographical identities: imposing one-to-one correspondences on them is not possible or even desirable. So, 'Phyllis and Rosamond' begins a trend in Virginia's writing that presents identity as something impossible to define or fix, foreshadowing the 'unlimited capacity and infinite variety' of Mrs Brown.[89] Moreover, such use of the sister trope, layering identities on top of each other, makes pairs of sisters impossible to separate and demonstrates Virginia's inclination to embellish auto/biographical materials with fiction.[90]

Testing the limits of genres likewise impacts the changes the narrator of 'Phyllis and Rosamond' goes through. Beginning in an observational stance and gaining increasing insight into the characters' thoughts, at the end the narrator is haunted by an inability to offer a summary independent of the conclusions implied in the sisters' reported actions and thoughts. This reporting, of course, is a conclusion of sorts, replacing the inspector-like vocabulary and distance with a narrative that looks forward to Virginia's major novels and their free indirect discourse. The initial set-up necessarily builds on inherited structures, but the fluctuating distance between the narrator and characters evidences the author's problems with the inherited genres and their conventions, which are already found lacking and partial. Finally, the reduced distance at the end signals an aspiration towards cognitive intimacy between the narrator and characters; if indeed there is anything optimistic about the end, it is the ease with which the narrator has learned to report the characters' inner worlds, having travelled there through an amalgamation of different genres.

But rather than a straightforward rejection of the authoritative frame, as suggested by Skrbic, the relationship between the different genres is ambiguous.[91] Biography, history, autobiography and fiction exist side by side, and the disappearance of the authoritarian voice lowers the boundaries that mark the generic differences. The story moves towards a hybrid

[89] Virginia Woolf, 'Character in Fiction', in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.37--54 (54).
[90] She would later praise biographers who use 'the novelist's art' 'to expound the private life' ('The New Biography', in *Selected Essays*, pp.95—100 [100]).
[91] Skrbic, p.96.

narrative that is open and pluralistic, both in its formal properties and its scope of reportable characters. This change relates to the increasing prominence of the characters' voices: as the narrator wanes, Phyllis, Rosamond, and even Sylvia Tristram, get to communicate their thoughts to the reader with growing intimacy. Thinking about the short-story as a site of 'resisting through polyphony', Christine Reynier links this 'shift from monologism to polyphony' to 'a departure from the authority of the Victorian patriarchal values' and cites Bakhtin to characterise '[t]his shift from a single centre of authority to "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses"'.[92] The dissolution of the authoritarian narrator is the first step towards a textual form that can represent what Bakhtin labels a Dostoevskian '*plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights*', or what I have already called seriality.[93]

Virginia begins to move towards such polyphony by employing the sister trope. Plurality is also crucial to mixing genres and the story's generic properties: as a genre, Snaith observes, the short-story was attractive to Virginia, because '[t]he form already allowed for diversity.'[94] It was more flexible than biography or history, and, as Snaith writes, such 'potential inconclusiveness of the genre added to its subversive possibilities.'[95] The short-story was a natural place to mix old and new and try out hybrid forms. The story's generic hybridity in effect enables and encourages polyphony: fiction allows Virginia to multiply her autobiographical experience so that it produces two sets of sisters – the Hibberts and the Tristrams – because there is strength in numbers. As we will see, each set of sisters has its faults, which proposes their equality and the heterogeneity of their stories, as does the generic mixture that emanates these experiences and begins to gesture towards a Derridean – and Woolfian – understanding of genre as following a 'principle of contamination'.[96]

SISTERS AND DIFFERENCE

The characters of 'Phyllis and Rosamond' comprise a study of how a multitude of voices may, or may not, meet and interact. Acts of sistering become difficult to perform in the space one might think most encouraging of them – Bloomsbury – with the Tristrams' introduction. The differences between the Hibberts and Tristrams become the main conflict,

[92] Christine Reynier, *Virginia Woolf's Ethics of the Short Story* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.127.
[93] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Carol Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.6.
[94] Snaith (2004), p.126.
[95] Snaith (2004), p.125.
[96] Jacques Derrida, 'Law of the Genre', trans. by Avital Ronell, *Glyph*, 7 (1980), p.204.

which escalates in the conversation between Phyllis and Sylvia. Initially, Phyllis and Rosamond, like Jane and Elizabeth Bennett, are described through their difference to their other three sisters: 'There are five of them [...] they are divided into camps: two sisters oppose themselves to two sisters; the fifth vacillates equally between them.' (17)[97] The differences among the five Hibbert daughters meld Phyllis and Rosamond together and increase their affinity, and thus the division 'into camps' – yet another masculine metaphor – defines their sister bond. Such an understanding of sisters as representatives of camps or types also features in the first mention of the Tristrams: Phyllis reflects on the differences between her 'lot' and that of the Tristrams: 'That was one of the many enviable parts of their lot.' (24) The word 'lot' carries a double meaning here, potentially referring to an incidental fate, and to a group of associated people, or kin, so to speak.

Besides the geographical difference between the two sets of sisters, their visual dissimilarity is emphasised. Entering the Tristram home, Phyllis immediately becomes 'conscious of her own appearance', which is 'like that of ladies whom Romney painted', whereas Miss Tristram, the host, wears 'a shooting jacket, with her arch little head held high, and her mouth pursed as though for an epigram' (24). Unlike the Hibberts' conventional feminine attire of 'white silk and [...] cherry ribbons', Miss Tristram's form associates her with masculine potency and ready wit and yet hints at an appealing feminine look via the highly-held head and pursed mouth. Archival evidence suggests that this particular passage caused Virginia much trouble: in the manuscript the Romney description continues for longer—'She had the same silk robe dress; the floating scarf and had she had a patch' has been crossed out.[98] Besides the visual and sartorial detail, Virginia also reconsidered how to express Phyllis's feelings of being '~~curiously out of place~~'.[99] In all versions, the passage bears a resemblance to Vanessa's recollection of their half-brother George's and Lady Margaret's wedding, where Vanessa was a bridesmaid, and the bride's sister had 'ordered in a grand coiffeur to do our hair and did her best to make us look like eighteenth-century ladies out of Reynolds or Romney with curls hanging to our shoulders and blue sashes'.[100] On the cusp of moving to Bloomsbury, Vanessa, too, felt curiously out of place at this wedding, and soon after the sisters agreed that Gordon Square was no place for their sister-in-law, 'a prim conventional woman'.[101] Like Virginia's 'Phyllis and Rosamond', Vanessa's memoir draws from her own experiences of bilocation.

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[97] After this statement, the fifth sister seems forgotten.
[98] Sussex, Monks House Papers, SxMs/18/2/A/23/F, [p.10].
[99] Sussex, Monks House Papers, SxMs/18/2/A/23/F, [p.10].
[100] *Sketches*, loc949.
[101] *Sketches*, loc959.

Furthermore, the opposition between the Hibberts and Tristrams clearly remains a central notion for the sisters' understanding of the other set: the repeated first and second person plural pronouns in the conversation between Phyllis and Sylvia emphasise not only each woman's readiness to speak on behalf of her sister, but also how far their experience represents everyone of their type—the daughters at home or the financially independent, notionally free women. On a more individual level, the oppositional 'we' and 'you' camps profoundly delimit the kinds of subjectivities that Phyllis and Sylvia are capable of imagining for themselves or each other: habitually, they are restrained by the defining distinction as a starting-point for relating to the other sister pair.

Despite embracing this highlighting of difference, both the Hibberts and Tristrams show willingness to bridge some of the distance between them. The Tristrams note the Hibberts' discomfort and 'felt themselves responsible' and 'as the result of a whisper', Sylvia 'undertook a private conversation with Phyllis' (26). Phyllis receives this opportunity to explain herself with pitiable urgency, which is the result of a combination of dissatisfaction with herself and a rekindled hope of sharing with the Tristrams. A discussion with Sylvia might result in a logical explanation of her own situation. The powerlessness Phyllis feels is augmented by an image of 'impotence', contrasted with the verbal and intellectual prowess both Tristrams have already demonstrated. Phyllis is wary of Sylvia's 'impersonal generalisations', which rings like a reservation about Bloomsbury conversations, and hints that also Sylvia's methods are imperfect. Phyllis regards the conversation as a possibility of finding Sylvia 'a solid woman', an authentic person, which in turn would give hope 'that they might meet some day on common ground' .

The overarching question seems to be whether women of Phyllis's type can share experiences or a point-of-view with women like Sylvia; can they deconstruct the reasons for Phyllis's impotence and Sylvia's impersonality and meet somewhere? Phyllis enters the conversation 'searching feverishly through a mass of artificial frivolities to lay hands on the solid grain of pure self which, she supposed lay hid somewhere' (26). She wishes to figure out Sylvia, but the sentence can be read as applying to both – the 'solid' core of each woman is covered by a weight of superficialities – and indeed neither Phyllis nor Sylvia is capable of analysing the burden of 'artificial frivolities' before trying to dive for the depths. This initial failing sets the course for their conversation, during which Sylvia commits to 'get[ting] to business at once', but fails to understand and dismantle Phyllis's answers, which she takes for insignificant frivolities, but which in fact are the forces that shape the Hibberts' life. Furthermore, Phyllis fails to communicate the realness of her superficial experience, and thus, although prompted by both a selfish desire to better understand her own subjectivity

and position, and an urge to sympathise with the other, the Hibberts and Tristrams are finally unable to bridge the gap between them.

Phyllis and Sylvia's conversation attempts to negotiate the possibilities of difference and sameness between (potential) peers. From the beginning, Sylvia cannot help but think of the Hibberts as a type: to her, they are subhuman '"young ladies"'—in fact, '[s]he had never considered the Hibberts as human beings before' (26). Trying to think of the Hibberts as 'human beings' instead of 'young ladies', Sylvia resorts to categorising them by occupation instead. Unfortunately, both of these categorisations – 'human beings' vs. 'young ladies', and classification by profession – are patriarchal 'compartments', to borrow Irigaray's word, and therefore it is no surprise that '[t]heir words' end up being 'the gag upon our lips', rather than helping the two women communicate.[102] Phyllis despairs and appeals to Sylvia: "Really Miss Tristram, you must remember that most young ladies are slaves; and you mustn't insult me because you happen to be free." (27) Phyllis calls herself and Rosamond 'young ladies', indicating that she, like Sylvia, has internalised these patriarchal categories. As if in a continuation of Sylvia's revaluation of the phrase – might 'young ladies' be 'human beings' instead? – she asserts that young ladies are 'slaves'. But Phyllis's words bring types back to the conversation, and Sylvia's response is an exemplary 'impersonal generalisation'. She betrays her inability to appreciate the uniqueness of Phyllis's personal experience by declaring "I like to know about people. After all you know, the human soul is the thing." To Phyllis, her and Rosamond's life seems incompatible with 'theories' about the human soul, and she falls back into talking about types, trying to communicate the mundanity of their life: "You must know dozens like us."

Sylvia continues to conceptualise 'young ladies': "I know your evening dresses […] I see you pass before me in beautiful processions, but I have never yet heard you speak." (27) The picture is unable to grant individual or human status to Phyllis and her type: whilst Sylvia seems aware of the emphasis on young ladies' outward appearance – they dress and move to please the eye – and her observation even captures the artificiality of the choreographed performance, she is unable to see beyond these surfaces. The sequential essence of 'processions' seems to cloud Sylvia from realising young ladies' singularity. Symptomatically, the second person pronoun she uses refers to everyone like Phyllis, and although she knows she has never heard Phyllis – or anyone like her – speak, she hardly listens when Phyllis does speak. Sylvia asks her, "Are you solid all through?" but does not wait for an answer before speaking again—which she does in good faith, thinking that 'this

[102] Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.212.

tone jarred upon Phyllis'. However, 'solid' might have actually been a word from the language of women: as noted above, Phyllis wished to find solidity in their conversation, but the opportunity passes them by due to Sylvia's quick judgement of what kind of tone someone like Phyllis is capable of.

Briefly, Sylvia tries to approach Phyllis more personally, appealing to a sense of kinship. She says: "I daresay we are sisters. But why are we so different outside?" (27) Sylvia's offering of metaphorical sisterhood to Phyllis uses 'the sister idiom to indicate "fictive kinship" within friends', which, Mauthner observes, relies on the similarities between female friendships and sistering, such as confiding.[103] Mauthner proposes that women's kin ties and friendships are socially constructed and very much alike, and, there being no 'agreed and socially sanctioned codes of conduct' for either, sistering, like friendship, 'requires us to imagine and negotiate all these dimensions of the tie ourselves.'[104] Thus, Sylvia's proposal of fictive kinship makes a claim on an invisible but fundamental similarity between herself and Phyllis, and the groups they represent, propounding that they share a common origin and lineage. But this offer of peace and friendship is immediately followed by a declaration of difference that feels like a counter-proclamation: since we are this different, how can we possibly be sisters?

Sylvia's offer of sisterhood fails because of a number of things. Sylvia cannot let go of their superficial differences and imagine the internal dimensions of their possible sameness. Phyllis, then again, is unable to differentiate between her internal and external qualities and has already judged that 'all efforts at freedom were in vain: long captivity had corrupted them both [her and Rosamond] within and without' (26). This corruption has imprisoned Phyllis into a superficial existence that leads her to respond to Sylvia's feeble offering of kinship with a passionate, bitter "O no, we're not sisters" (27). Phyllis's line repeats and significantly alters Sylvia's, strongly rejecting the sororal image. Phyllis gives a slight concession: "at least I pity you if we are", explaining that 'we' – her and her sister, and her fictional sisters, other young ladies – are "brought up just to come out in the evening and make pretty speeches [...] and marry." Phyllis does not stop to consider the invisible kinship which Sylvia's remark offered, and they are therefore unable to find a shared language. Decisively, Phyllis emphasises the supposed difference between Rosamond and herself and the Tristrams: "Of course you and your sister are the real thing, and Rosamond and I are frauds: at least I am." (27) Phyllis ends her consideration of the possible sisterhood by highlighting seemingly irreconcilable differences. The failure of the characters' fictive

[103] Mauthner, p.23.
[104] Mauthner, p.22.

sisterhood is most decisive here, as both Sylvia and Phyllis fail to imagine the sororal alternative as a polyphonous space allowing difference.

At the end, after another handful of Sylvia's unhelpful, naïve questions, Phyllis has become cynical. The conversation is largely a frustrating failure: they have now negotiated the terms of their kinship, and it is a very distant one, a pitiable sisterhood. Finally, though, perhaps the women's significant failure is not in what they have spoken, but in the fact that neither of them has been able to listen. Their conversation persuasively demonstrates that involving many voices is not enough, and that in order to have a truly dialogic exchange the participants must also listen, as only then can they begin to imagine a shared language. Here, at the latest, we must relinquish any notions about sororal space as a utopia, because, as we see in 'Phyllis and Rosamond', sisterhood, fictive or otherwise, often involves a failure to hear the other. Sylvia and Phyllis are unable to accommodate difference within their understandings of sisterhood, lacking the open-mindedness to imagine difference not as a hindrance to being sisters, but as an inherent component.

THE END OF TALKING

The negated possibility of kinship between Phyllis and Sylvia shakes Phyllis so that it affects her relationship with her actual sister. Leaving the Tristrams, the Hibberts 'were both somewhat excited; and anxious to analyse their discomfort, and find out what it meant' (28). Both expect that their usual candle-lit analysis will shed light on their experience. It turns out, however, that the object of the sisters' dissatisfaction is something they cannot address: they are unsatisfied with themselves. The conversation with Sylvia and the dissatisfaction it forced Phyllis to realise make her question her self: 'in penetrating to her real self Phyllis had let in some chill gust of air to that closely guarded place; what did she really want, she asked herself? What was she fit for?' (28) Her 'real self' is something that her usual conversations – not even those with Rosamond – do not address. Her insecurity is too deep for the words she and Rosamond have available. Her being 'too genuinely depressed to state the case to her sister', their conversation dies out. An identity crisis cannot be discussed in the tone of the conversations we have witnessed between the sisters, which have, although genuinely affectionate, been superficial.

Phyllis is left 'with the conviction that talking did no good; and if she could do anything, it must be done by herself' (29). Phyllis is perhaps starting to – painfully – discover her individuality and its importance, but rejecting talking altogether is rash. Previously, talking has been the only thing that has helped the Hibberts, and the Tristrams

reached their Bloomsbury existence as a pair. In the closing sentence, Phyllis's rejection of talking extends to thinking—she anticipates tomorrow with relief: 'at any rate she need not think' (29). Material circumstances helped the Stephen sisters out of a situation like the Hibberts', but for Virginia and Vanessa, talking and thinking about a different kind of future were an alleviation. Sadly, the Hibberts, trapped in June 1906, do not possess the vocabulary for talking about their newly-surfaced unhappiness with their selves, and it is difficult to imagine an image they might borrow from the masculine discourses they have limited access to—such deeply immersed insecurity about the self and attempts to identify disturbing likenesses and differences with their female peers being so particular to 'young ladies'.

'Phyllis and Rosamond', in its representation of young women's obscure lives, inevitably relies on sistering practices, which had been vital to the young Virginia Stephen. The short-story demonstrates the issues of social invisibility that cling to sisters and other invisible ties that lack their own discourses and spaces. At this point, there is little to suggest the possibilities of invention in the absence of socially conditioned vocabulary, and although the Tristrams have somehow reached a life that looks like liberty, the short-story ends on a dejected note with the Hibberts who do not know how to communicate a deeply upsetting realisation about their selves to each other. Phyllis finds herself incapable of deliberating on subjectivity, both in her patchy conversation with Sylvia and with Rosamond, as their interrupted intimacy submits to silence. Phyllis and Rosamond's sisterhood becomes disturbed when the sisters are called to consider their individuality, and even their 'genuine feeling' for each other is revealed to be lacking in depth (19).

In her analysis of sister talk, Mauthner highlights the range of topics it encompasses: sisters cover '"everyday talk" and work, in a variety of styles: bickering, teasing, having a giggle, gossiping, confiding, asking and giving advice, and listening. There [is] also "catching up", playful and serious talk.'[105] The Hibberts fall silent when asked to deliver serious talk, and their primary sistering practice, talking, fails; likewise, Sylvia fails to listen to Phyllis and thus is unable to offer sensible advice. The short-story's employment of a multitude of positions emphasises talk as a fundamental aspect of sistering. The detailed portrayal of the sister relationship suggests the depression when communication between two peers fails, verifying both the author's awkwardness about gaps that seemed unbridgeable and her affirmation of the force of talking to one's equals. In trying to discover one's 'real self' and in describing transformational life experiences,

[105] Mauthner, p.166.

Virginia began by employing the image of sisters and doubles (28). A couple of years later, in 'Reminiscences', she would again make use of her sister as a double of her own experience in order to probe her own subjectivity.

A SISTER'S LIFE

Before exploring the novels, I want to consider the sororal in Virginia's earliest known autobiographical composition, 'Reminiscences'. As seen, her first short-story establishes the sister trope as a fundamental construct in her fiction: the bond is celebrated and questioned; sisters identities are assembled and blended, at times as far as to make them inseparable. This fusing of sisterly subjects is closely related to her lasting tendency to hybridise genres; unsurprisingly, 'Reminiscences' likewise uses the trope to fuse Virginia's identity with Vanessa's. Organising social life according to sisterly models, and portraying one's sister, present the same challenge: allowing difference within sameness. 'Reminiscences' celebrates the Stephen sisters' early companionship: the first sharp-eyed memory it records is that of them 'drift[ing] together like ships in an immense ocean' under the nursery-table, which concludes in 'some consciousness between us that the other held possibilities.'[106] Already here, the sisters are presented 'together'; yet they are also 'the other' for each other. However, beyond this encounter – which declares the usefulness of Vanessa's otherness – there is little attempt to describe their relationship; instead, 'Reminiscences' merges Vanessa with the mother and the author's evolving subjectivity.

Silence is crucial to the construction of the sister relationship in 'Reminiscences'. Alongside talking and language-making, silence must be considered a sistering practice, since, as Mauthner writes, it 'play[s] a key role in constructing and deconstructing what often appear to be fixed roles and relationships between sisters'.[107] 'Reminiscences' describes a cataclysmic period in the sisters' herstory and their evolving subjectivities; although often labelled autobiographical, the piece is actually a biography of the author's sister, 'Nessa's life'.[108] Whereas in 'Phyllis and Rosamond', the sisters' lived experiences were dispersed to several characters, in 'Reminiscences' Vanessa represents the experiences of both herself and Virginia, so that the biographical fuses with the autobiographical. As the life of a sister, 'Reminiscences' makes a claim on limitless intimacy, struggles with the possibility of separate identities, and, by using the sister, the other, as a placeholder for the self, raises

[106] 'Reminiscences', p.2. Further references will appear in the body text.
[107] Mauthner, p.71.
[108] *Letters*, I, p.325.

ethical concerns about the biographical – and fictionalised – representation of real subjects, which also pertain to Virginia's later characterisations of Vanessa.

'Reminiscences' is usually critiqued according to premises set by Jeanne Schulkind as the editor of *Moments of Being*, where it first appeared: it is seen as a flawed apprentice piece. Especially Schulkind's questioning of the text's 'intended' genre (biography) and what it actually is – 'it is in fact a memoir' – has been eagerly taken up by critics.[109] However, Schulkind's reflection on its generic hybridity – 'no meaningful distinction can be made here between biography (of Vanessa) and autobiography' – has not been adequately developed.[110] A typical reading finds 'Reminiscences' Victorian and weak and tends to argue that whilst it is framed as a biography of a sister, it is in fact either an autobiography, or about Virginia's mother, or even her father.[111] The critics placing Julia at the centre of 'Reminiscences', like LuAnn McCracken, do so more justifiably as the narrative does focus on the mother and mother-like characters—Stella and Vanessa.[112] Nevertheless, I suggest that the text also benefits from being read as its author intended: a biography of her sister. Julia's prominence certainly is definitive but rather than treating the text and its author to retrospective wisdom, I believe the reader's task is to notice of what this centrality of the maternal does to the characterisation of the biographer's sister, the declared subject.

Besides the stubborn trend of finding Virginia's life more interesting than Vanessa's, critics' willingness to read 'Reminiscences' as an autobiography has probably been encouraged by its name's memoir-like connotations. The title, however, was introduced by Schulkind—Virginia gave it no name, although she corrected it and had it typed. S.P. Rosenbaum considers the implications of calling the text 'Reminiscences':

> To classify this writing as reminiscences obscures the work's generic originality and misconstrues its emphasis and tone. Woolf is not reminiscing. She is telling a

[109] Jeanne Schulkind, 'Introduction' to Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd edn (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp.11—24 (11).
[110] Schulkind, p.26.
[111] Christopher Dahl argues that the father is 'very much' the 'presiding figure' ('Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being* and Autobiographical Tradition in the Stephen Family', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10.2 [1983], p.181). Virginia Hyman even concludes that the author of 'Reminiscences' 'rejected […] her own female identity', although the piece is clearly an early instance of 'think[ing] back through our mothers' ('Reflections in the Looking-Glass: Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10.2 [1983], p.212; *A Room of One's Own*, p.57).
[112] Even Dunn neglects a direct discussion of 'Reminiscences' as 'Nessa's life', although she draws from it extensively. Her only explicit reference to the work calls it Virginia's 'reminiscences of [Stella's] engagement and marriage', thus prioritising Stella's portrayal before Vanessa's (p.50).

nephew the early family history of his mother, and Woolf comes to it primarily as the authorial narrator.[113]

Indeed, the text, which begins with 'Your mother was born in 1879', refers to 'your mother' and 'your grandmother' consistently enough to maintain an impression of being written as a letter to the yet-unborn Julian Bell (1). The actual readers of the text were, however, its subject Vanessa and her new husband. Writing about – and to – her closest peer, her sister, recorded their shared past, but it also attempted to define Virginia's place in her new family, which now included Clive and soon a nephew. To further complicate its generic categorisation, 'Reminiscences' also contains tentatively imaginary elements. Thus, my reading of the text both regards the intended subject in a horizontal relationship to her biographer and acknowledges its generic diversity: its fictitious elements foreshadowing Virginia's later work, its addressing Julian as an intended recipient and the Bells as the implicit recipients (which, in Lee's view, makes it a 'love-letter' to Vanessa), and its mixing of biography and autobiography, amount to what Rosenbaum calls 'autobiographical biography'[114]—a hybrid category that tolerates (re)writing a family script, makes claims of intimate kinship, and uses a life narrative shared with a sister to work on an evolving feminine subjectivity.

'MY BIOGRAPHY'

Vanessa was more than the main inspiration for 'Reminiscences'; essentially, she also started writing it. In July 1907, Vanessa excitedly wrote to her sister: 'I have begun to write my biography. I don't think you will find me a rival to you, Billy. The literary style will be mixed and discursive. I find that I shall have so much to say that it will take me years to write.'[115] She reassures her ever-competitive 'Billy' by giving an amateurish impression of her style. Virginia's style, too, was 'mixed' in terms of genre, but in 'Reminiscences' she suddenly became extremely formal and self-consciously literary, very much contrasting the humorous style of the biographical sketches she had recently written about her aunts and Violet. In another letter, Vanessa called her autobiography 'simply a jumble', and

[113] S.P. Rosenbaum, *Edwardian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group*, Vol 2 (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), p.383.
[114] Lee, p.235, Rosenbaum, p.390.
[115] *Selected Letters*, p.51.

contrastingly, Virginia's version of her life became 'remarkably well constructed', as Vanessa graciously praised.[116]

Vanessa's declaration of having 'so much to say' ill suits general ideas of her as silent and private. During the week she was writing, she was strongly inspired by themes that Virginia would take up: Vanessa, too, was thinking through their mothers when she eagerly wrote: 'Is it true that Thackeray was in love with Granny? I ask for the purposes of my biography!'[117] She was, likewise, thinking about family life: 'I shall soon devote a chapter of my biography to family life.'[118] Alongside her Stephen family, she was also thinking ahead to the next generation: 'What shall I do with my family of 4 when they grow up?'[119] Vanessa welcomed her sister's views on family life as an inspiration, and, possibly recalling the disagreement between Virginia and Stella's widower Jack Hills about Leslie's letters, she specified: 'I hope you're writing a long letter to me full of *your* views, not Waller's, on family life. [...] I feel sure your odd mind is stored with clear wisdom on the subject'.[120]

After about a week of writing, Vanessa despaired over her biography, calling it 'not fit to be read' and 'simply a jumble [...] of all the people and incidents I can remember up to the age of 14.'[121] Directly after, she asked Virginia: 'Why don't you write yours?' Instead of writing her own, Virginia took up her sister's life—whether or not the project was willingly handed over or hijacked by surprise, Vanessa, consistently soft-spoken in her letters during the first year after her marriage, soon knew Virginia was writing something new, and flatteringly asked, 'Is your Life as good as your letters?'[122] Vanessa's discontinued autobiography implicitly shaped what Virginia's 'Reminiscences' became: besides making it a self-consciously literary work of a writer – instead of a painter's 'jumble' – it also placed the mother and family life at the thematic centre and even employed Jack as a source of friction. It is notable that although Virginia never called her piece 'reminiscences', Vanessa used the word to describe hers: writing to Virginia, she rejoices that 'old Henry James' won't be asking 'me about my writings—though no doubt my reminiscences, which have come to a full stop at page 13, would interest him very much.'[123] Furthermore, Vanessa's autobiography ended in her 14th year, and she was 15 during the first major event in 'Reminiscences', Julia's death. Most important, however, is the ambiguity present in

[116] *Selected Letters*, p.57, 62.
[117] *Selected Letters*, p.53.
[118] *Selected Letters*, p.54.
[119] *Selected Letters*, p.54.
[120] *Selected Letters*, p.55.
[121] *Selected Letters*, p.57.
[122] *Selected Letters*, p.58.
[123] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 14 August 1907.

Vanessa's question about 'your Life': instead of the suggested project of writing her own life, Virginia was compelled to take over Vanessa's. Of course, to some extent their shared herstory made it understandable that Virginia chose to approach the autobiographical genre via an autobiographical biography of her sister, but the project's origins also reveal her possessive inclination and define the disparate power relationship between the subject and her biographer, which lay some of the groundwork of Virginia's representations of Vanessa.

'MY OWN PROPER SCIENCE'

'Reminiscences' also sprung from Virginia's adverse reaction to the necessity of coming to terms with Vanessa's marriage and her impending motherhood. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, she found it difficult to understand Vanessa's choice of married life, thought of it as a betrayal, and associated it with deaths—not only their brother Thoby's, which partly pushed Vanessa to accept Clive's proposal, but also their mother's and Stella's. Virginia's emotions fluctuated constantly: At times she felt that Vanessa's marriage had diminished her as a sister—she wrote to Violet that she was expecting 'Nessa [...] – what one calls Nessa; but it means husband and baby, and of sister there is less than there used to be.'[124] At other times, she maintained that Vanessa 'might marry 20 Clives and still be the most delightful creature in the world.'[125] As Lee points out, Virginia reacted to her sister's pregnancy by promoting her own metaphoric fertility as an "authoress"—a role part of the triptych of "a virgin, an Aunt, an authoress" she assigned herself to oppose Vanessa's fertility.[126] Lee demonstrates how Virginia's mythologised life of Violet, 'Friendship's Gallery', 'emphasised her own credentials for maternal feeling' and gave her control of a baby and a life of her own.[127] Writing 'Reminiscences' was likewise imitative of Vanessa's fertility; Virginia took on the project about the time her sister's pregnancy started to show.

Virginia was both imitating Vanessa's life-making and increasingly spinning out the metaphors that were becoming customary in describing her sister. Often, the audience of these images was Clive, and making up figures for Vanessa was a frequent element in Virginia's peculiarly flirtatious and possessive letters to her brother-in-law. She boasted about having put Walter Hedlam in order about 'my own proper science: the theory of Vanessa', by which she reminded Clive about her particular claim to his wife on the basis of

[124] *Letters*, I, p.307.
[125] *Letters*, I, p.297.
[126] Lee, p.234.
[127] Lee, p.235.

their shared 'Stephen humanity'.[128] The images of Vanessa often apotheosised her – 'a Goddess' – or they likened her to plants: 'Nessa is [...] as some rich flower drawing nourishment tranquilly all day long.'[129] The myth of Vanessa as a Mother Earth-like figure, which would endure in the Bloomsbury Group, was taking deep root.

Clive's role in engendering these images was crucial: he was their prime recipient, and, at least in some letters, co-author or -parent. Virginia lamented not seeing Vanessa alone since the wedding and described her impressions of Vanessa to Violet: 'you know the kind of image one gets of her, coloured by Clive—It is very beautiful and happy and all that; but it is rather tantalising.'[130] Vanessa's marriage started to overtly define her, and the 'tantalising' images, Virginia felt, were inevitably tainted with her husband. Virginia was ambivalent about Clive: she resented him, but concurrently she enticingly invited him to join in her game, writing to him: 'How is my ---- I dont know what degree of reticence should be between us; but you can fill up the blank with any figure you like; my balance is boundless.'[131] By allowing Clive to fill the blank, she encouraged a figure of Vanessa tinted by the marriage, but also attested her own position as the primary author. Virginia's ability to come up with images for Vanessa was 'boundless', but when these figures 'perish[ed] before her', as they always did, instead of addressing the short-comings of her 'game', Virginia pictured the images' insufficiency as further evidence of Vanessa's boundlessness.[132]

MOTHERS

In 'Reminiscences' and thereafter, Vanessa's imagined character is imbued with the maternal. After Julia's and Stella's deaths, she takes on the mother's duties; although Virginia acknowledges that they were 'in our morbid state, haunted by great ghosts', her conviction that 'to be like mother, or like Stella, was to achieve the height of human perfection' was hard to lose when it came to her characterisation of Vanessa (25). Part of the context of 'Reminiscences' was Virginia's bitter paralleling of the real and surrogate mothers' deaths with Vanessa's marriage and her soon-to-be-real motherhood. Virginia felt that, by marrying and having a baby, Vanessa was replacing her: she often wrote of herself as Vanessa's 'firstborn', appealing not to be forgotten.[133] 'Reminiscences' recorded the

[128] *Letters*, I, p.289.
[129] *Letters*, I, p.299, 318; 310.
[130] *Letters*, I, p.291.
[131] *Letters*, I, p.305.
[132] *Letters*, I, p.310.
[133] *Letters*, II, p.312.

sisters' shared experiences as well as solidified Vanessa as a motherly character in Virginia's imaginary.

As a mother figure, Vanessa becomes an indispensable central entity for Virginia through the chain of events narrated in 'Reminiscences'. The opening words of the biography – 'Your mother' -- define Vanessa via her maternal role (1). The child Vanessa, 'always the eldest', is labelled with maternal qualities, such as trustworthiness, seriousness, and a strong appreciation of family (2). After Julia's death, Stella turns to Vanessa not only because of her unique 'honesty and wisdom', but also 'because she found in Vanessa both in nature and in person something like a reflection of her mother' (19). This dual-natured appreciation of Vanessa is symptomatic of Virginia's figuring of her: on one hand, Vanessa is an extraordinary individual, on the other, Virginia projects their mother's qualities onto her. The mothers' centrality exposes the definitiveness of the matrilineal heritage both to Vanessa's character and Virginia's portrayal of their sisterhood.

Julia's character gives form to the biography: her death ends the first chapter, the second chapter covers its aftermath, the third chapter begins with it again, and the transition between the third and fourth chapter repeats the pattern, only this time with Stella's death. Julia is therefore 'the central figure' is terms of content and form (17). A central figure wards off the chaos, holding everything together in life and art, as Virginia would demonstrate in *To the Lighthouse*. Once Julia and Stella are 'removed [...] from our eyes', this central figure becomes Vanessa in the beginning of chapter 4 (17). The narrator supposes the process natural: 'It generally happens in seasons of such bewilderment [...] that one person becomes immediately the central figure, as it were the solid figure, and on this occasion it was your mother.' (25) Solidity and centrality indeed become the main attributes of the Mother Earth-like imaging of Vanessa, recycled in Helen Ambrose, Mrs Ramsay, and Susan. In 'Reminiscences', Virginia acknowledges Vanessa's bewilderment at her 'inheritance', but never fully breaks with the tone of Leslie's *Mausoleum Book* and so initiates the enduring problematic way of portraying her sister (25).

SISTER SUBSTITUTE

In comparison with other examples of the genre, the first four chapters of Vanessa's life offer a remarkably uneven portrayal of her. At times the narrator seems privy to her most intimate secrets, at others the portrayed sister is more like a lifeless dummy. Notably, for all the biographer's efforts to make her subject's artistic sensitivity evident, there is little mention of her formal artistic education, even though Vanessa attended Sir Arthur Cope's

school from 1896 and the Royal Academy from 1901—years which the chapters cover. The omission of her education is not the only biographical convention ignored: there is, unusually, nothing in the subject's own voice—typically, biographies would make vast use of letters, as Virginia certainly knew. These lapses erase some of the particularity of Vanessa's voice and experience as a visual artist, and, conveniently, make her character a yielding vessel for Virginia's autobiography.

Significantly, the existing attempts to portray Vanessa as a nascent artist define her artistic sense as private and secret. '[T]he passion for art', or 'the other passion' (as opposed to Vanessa's passion for family), is repeatedly pictured as hidden: it 'burn[s]' 'beneath the serious surface' (2). Her artistic sensitivity appears as an afterthought to her other attributes: '[s]he was also, on her secret side, sensitive to all beauty of colour and form' (26). The narrator's awareness of this 'secret side' makes her conspiratorially associated with it; other than with her, Vanessa 'hid [it], because her views did not agree with those current around her, and she feared to give pain' (26). The hyperbolic assumption that Vanessa's views on art would have 'give[n] pain' demonstrates the drift between the young female artists and the rest of the family. To the same effect, the narrator refers to 'rubbed […] out' or imaginary canvases in her portrayal of the budding artist (2).

The narrator recalls that 'talk of art, talk of [Vanessa's] own gifts and loves, was unknown to her' (2). This lack of appropriate vocabulary may limit the narrator's ability to picture the art that could be or was made, but her insight does produce a tender impression of a tentative artist, 'with her long fingers grouping [sic], and her eye considering' (2). The image suggests Vanessa's sense of being adrift, but it also pictures her waking to the powers of her artist's body. Such sensory experiences depicted through Vanessa in 'Reminiscences' may be read as predecessors of Virginia's later writings about her sister's art, in which, as Humm writes, she comes to know her haptic self.[134] However, the 'grouping' fingers and 'considering' eyes also suggest the biographer's difficulty in imagining 'What did she think then?' (2) Despite being the chosen spokesperson when Vanessa needed to communicate with others about her art – such as news of a drawing prize – Virginia's access into her artist sister's secret mind is inevitably limited, and instead of pursuing that lacking 'talk of art', she resorts to understanding 'the other passion' through her own passions and experiences, which, although certainly much akin to Vanessa's, are not identical with them. In consequence, the straightforward projection fails to account for their differences.

[134] Humm (2012), p.74.

For the most part, Virginia uses her sister as a double of her own experience as a gifted young woman defying patriarchal traditions. McCracken, in her interpretation of 'Reminiscences' as Virginia's first try to understand 'the importance of her mother for her own sense of identity', identifies the narrator's use of Vanessa as substituting one thing for another: 'Vanessa substitutes for Virginia and thus permits Woolf to explore her own reactions without having to attribute them to herself.'[135] Concentrating on the mother and the author's evolving identity, McCracken makes no comment on what this process does to the substituted sister's identity. I note that the lines between biographer and subject are blurred time and again when Virginia credits Vanessa, and by implication herself, with a sense of determination, rigid standards applied to characters and arguments, or honesty of mind and vision. McCracken presents an example of Virginia's technique of substitution in this passage:

> She was a happy creature! beginning to feel within her the spring of unsuspected gifts, that the sea was beautiful and might be painted some day, and perhaps once or twice she looked steadily in the glass when no one was by and saw a face that excited her strangely; her being began to have a definite shape, a place in the world—what was it like? (4)

Virginia employs strongly autobiographical images to describe Vanessa's dawning sense of possibility for art and identity; the passage might as well have been written about its author. The image of looking at her reflection also plays with singularity and plurality: whilst the act is described as private, the reflection of course is a reproduction of the original. In some ways the passage positively affirms Vanessa's identity as something distinct and related to the visual arts: like a drawing or model, Vanessa's being is described as beginning to 'have a definite shape', and the question 'what was it like?' displays honest and generous curiosity. But, like Vanessa's 'natural development, in which the artistic gift [...] would have asserted itself', Virginia's ability to allow her sister her own definite, separate shape is disrupted by the loss of their mother (4).

The sense of a 'we' that fuses the sisters' identities, not allowing for differences, intensifies when Vanessa takes on the mother's familial duties. There is unifying strength in the shared plural identity: the sisters join to oppose their father – if not face to face, then at least in imaging him as 'the tyrant of inconceivable selfishness' – and in consoling the

[135] LuAnn McCracken, '"The Synthesis of My Being": Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 1 (1990), pp.66—67.

widowed Jack (27). However, Vanessa's experience in trying to fill the gap their mother and Stella had left must have been markedly different from Virginia's, who did not have as many duties.[136] Nonetheless, Virginia aligns herself with Vanessa's experience after Stella's death: 'it was so hard to be herself. She was but just eighteen, and when she should have been free and tentative, she was required to be definite and exact.' (26) The gloom and conventions of Hyde Park Gate obstructed the development of young female identities—both the subject's and the author's.

However, Virginia was not the one who endured their father's rages and 'stood before him like a stone' (27). In fact, this image of a stone-like Vanessa strikes an arresting contrast with other passages, which imply that she would enunciate her opposition loudly: the narrator observes a 'passionate mouth' on her, which suggests 'that it was certain she would not stay long quiescent'; she recalls how she 'would meet Thoby in argument' and declares that '[a] girl who had character would not tolerate such speeches' (26, 27). Indeed, these descriptions seem more characteristic of Virginia. In 'Reminiscences', Virginia admits to having made their father 'the type of all that we hated in our lives', but finally she fails to appreciate the distinctness of Vanessa's experience of running the household and answering to their ever-unsatisfied father for seven years (27). Moreover, as Lee suggests, the memory of their father verbally abusing her sister and Virginia's own inability to interfere continued to 'obsess her'.[137] It appears that her 'speechless' 'rage' and 'frustration' and 'pity for Nessa' could not be exorcised even through her writing.[138] 'Reminiscences' hints to several ungrasped realisations: whilst it records the herstory that explains Virginia's possessiveness of Vanessa and her obsessive tendency to portray her as a mother, it does not acknowledge the partiality of such portraits, and, in an even more severe short-coming, it fails to allow for important differences between the sisters—including that one of them retrospectively found their 'uncompromising anger' towards their father 'unjust', but the other, possibly, silently, did not (27).

SILENCE

Virginia's inability or unwillingness to record and narrativise the differences between herself and Vanessa frames the abrupt ending of 'Reminiscences'. Vanessa's 'Life' strangely ends with the sisters' visit to Jack Hills' home. Jack was now beginning 'to take a regular

[136] Lee, p.142.
[137] Lee, p.148.
[138] 'Sketch of the Past', p.147.

and unthinking satisfaction in being with [Vanessa]' (30)—previously the sisters had shared the relationship with him. Schulkind cites Quentin Bell in suggesting that this 'difficulty [...] of describing Vanessa's affair with Jack' is the cause for the biography's abrupt ending.[139] Indeed the last sentence describes a gap opening between the sisters: 'Now and again I rebelled in the old way against [Jack], but with an instant sense of treason, when I realized with what silence, as of one possessed of incommunicable knowledge, Vanessa met my plaints.' (30) The sisters' shared rebellion now appears a thing of the past and is replaced with a 'sense of treason' and 'silence'; now Vanessa possesses something that cannot be shared with her sister, whereas so far, the biographer has always seemed privy to her secrets. From 'Sketch of the Past', we know that actually the possibility of Jack and Vanessa's marriage finally just cemented Virginia's loyalty to her sister: 'Then I realised that she had her side; if that were so, of course I was on her side.'[140] This realisation of Vanessa having had her side, or her unique experience, is absent from 'Reminiscences'.

Discussing the ending of 'Reminiscences', Rosenbaum echoes Schulkind, proposing that '[t]he painful relations of the sisters on the subject of a man who might have been Vanessa's husband was too immediate a personal problem as well.'[141] Furthermore, he argues that the "we" of the biography 'has now become an "I" and a "she"' and that the biography ends 'with Vanessa's silence.'[142] Whilst this disruption is arguably temporary, it is a significant one. The 'Life' was clearly not complete; in fact, Vanessa expected her sister to continue writing, being particularly interested in how she would portray her romance with Jack: 'I am longing to go on and have more to read, for the relations between me and Waller will be most interesting!'[143] But it appears that in 1907—8 Virginia could not find the words to continue the story of Vanessa's life which now required her to portray her sister as an independent, sexual being in relation to men she might have married. So, Vanessa's 'incommunicable' silence in facing Virginia's rebellion 'in the old way' is paralleled by Virginia's writing descending into silence.

As Mauthner observes, silence can be crucial to maintaining and dismantling the assigned roles in sisters' relationships: '[i]n sistering, talk/language and silence can open up or close options for modifying subjectivities and relationships.'[144] The silence at the end of 'Reminiscences' is a closing of possibilities for Vanessa's subjectivity, as the biography tries to limit the scope of her personal relationships. Virginia refuses, either consciously or

[139] Schulkind, p.26.
[140] 'Sketch of the Past', p.145.
[141] Rosenbaum, p.390.
[142] Rosenbaum, pp.389—390.
[143] *Selected Letters*, p.62.
[144] Mauthner, p.72.

unconsciously, to represent her sister in the heterosexual relationships that were just hers—the possessiveness is emphasised by her ability to describe their shared involvement with Jack, until she felt jealous. This inability to find the language required for this representation is linked to Virginia's impression at the time of writing 'Reminiscences', that Vanessa was, once more, 'one possessed of incommunicable knowledge' (30): despite Vanessa's letters to her being warm as ever – she continued addressing her sister with familiar nick names, such as 'My Billy', 'Wombat', 'Sweet William', and would often send 'Love to the singeries' by 'Your Maria'[145] – Virginia felt estranged by her descriptions of married life. Describing sentiments of incommunicability, she wrote to Clive that 'my feeling [...] for you and Nessa [...] is unspeakable.'[146] Sexuality, alongside motherhood, would eventually come to overdetermine the fictional portraits of Vanessa, but at this time, her sexuality was beyond words for Virginia. This, finally, is the harshest failure of 'Reminiscences'—the silencing of an aspect of its subject's individuality and the related silence between the sisters that delimits their roles, including, significantly, what they could be for one another.

HAUNTING VANESSA

Virginia had reservations about 'Nessa's life' that she associated with her motivations for writing the piece altogether. The letter presenting the text to her intended audience, the Bells, shows her primary motivation had to do with Vanessa. Promising Clive '2 chapters in a day or two', she writes:

> It might have been so good! As it is, I am too near, and too far; and it seems to be blurred, and I ask myself why write it at all? seeing I never shall recapture what you have, by your side this minute. I should like to write a very subtle work on the proper writing of lives. What it is that you can write—and what writing is. It comes over me that I know nothing of the art; but blunder in a rash way after motive, and human character; [...] I should choose my writing to be judged as a chiselled block, unconnected with my hand entirely.[147]

[145] *Selected Letters*, pp.51—57.
[146] *Letters*, I, p.334.
[147] *Letters*, I, p.325.

Virginia is unsatisfied with the distance between herself and her subject, and this fluctuating imbalance of being 'too near, and too far' undermines the whole project. Her question about the reasons for writing the life is immediately followed by the implied purpose: to 'recapture' Vanessa. The life tries to regain something that its author once had but now feels to have lost: the constancy of Vanessa's companionship.

Writing the biography enabled Virginia to seemingly take possession of the life, like she had already done with the fantastic giant baby Violet in 'Friendship's Gallery'. A child or the young girl of 'Reminiscences' could be admired, but, also, more easily than an adult woman, possessed.[148] Reading the manuscript, Vanessa indeed 'felt plunged into the midst of that awful underworld', suggesting that the awfulness was chiefly due to 'George's commonplaceness' – hinting at his sexual oppression of the sisters – and declaring that 'I hope no one will ever have to go through it again.'[149] 'Reminiscences', to its subject, was 'a very good' portrait of their mother, but also heavily oppressive. Some of this oppression would have emanated from Virginia's characteristic jealousy and haunting need to possess and narrate Vanessa and her life, which, especially when deployed to brand Vanessa with silence, resulted in ethically questionable portrayals.

In addition, Virginia's motivation for creating 'Reminiscences' relates directly to her fascination with the 'proper writing of lives'. Having written the life of her sister, she concludes that 'I know nothing of the art'; she is aware of the unapproachability of some topics; it may even be that the motives that structure 'Reminiscences' were rashly constituted. Her desire to have her 'writing judged as' sculpture – for its form only – sounds like a defensive insurance policy for extremely autobiographical writing. It is no wonder that Virginia felt that 'Reminiscences' had to be introduced with some padding: as McCracken demonstrates, it dealt with the author's deeply sensitive ego formation. In trying to formulate her evolving subjectivity within the narrative of crisis that 'Reminiscences' records, using the tools available to her, and the consequent heavy reliance on the placeholder sister were understandable solutions. Mauthner's linking of sistering and evolution of subjectivities suggests that such use of one's sister is not unusual—it does, however, become problematic with a power imbalance such as that between Virginia and Vanessa, when one possesses language and the other is assigned to silence.

Indeed, fixing Vanessa as a semi-divine 'young Queen' or a force of nature capable of '"transmut[ing]"' Virginia and others manifests admiration and even love, but it also robs

[148] Around this time, Virginia often pictured Vanessa as a child, see e.g. *Letters*, I, p.309.
[149] *Selected Letters*, p.62.

Vanessa of her humanity (25).[150] This Virginia indulged in already as a child, when she nicknamed Vanessa the 'Saint': the sharp-tongued sister invented the name, but in 'Reminiscences' she distances herself from the pain it caused Vanessa by vaguely blaming 'children [...] apt to use [their wit] cruelly' (4). This show of the biographer's selective power is yet another example of her unwillingness to address the difficulties in the sisters' relationship. In fact, it would be more fitting to speak of Virginia having consumed and transmuted Vanessa than vice versa, since, like the nickname 'Saint', the portrait in 'Reminiscences' and related contemporary imagings of Vanessa came to define her not only to Virginia, but also, less critically and with much less nuance and depth, to their friends and to posterity.

WRITING FAMILY SCRIPTS

In July 1907, Virginia wrote to Violet about her wish to become 'a writer of such English as shall one day burn the pages'. This has become one of her most-cited utterances. The rest of the letter reveals that the context was one of thinking about how to write about her family:

> I saw George and Margaret, and felt as I always feel 10 years old, with Aunts and Uncles and nice manners [...] I think old George is a little hurt, because he counted the weeks since we had met, and said he never saw his 'family' now. I see he is too much hurt to speak naturally even of Nessa and Clive.
>
> But what my position among them all is, I dont know; [...] Georges odd relics of what was once affection—and then there is Nessa, like a wasteful child pulling the heads off flowers—beautiful as a Goddess (at which you always smile) and Clive with his nice tastes, and kindness to me, and his slightness and acidity—well I might pour out the English language without making a coherent story of it.
>
> Anyhow, [...] [this letter] looks too intimate. Now I am going to get out all my books again, [...] and I am going to write in my head, where I always write immortal works, [...] and I am going to walk round my desk and then take out certain manuscripts which lie there like wine, sweetening as they grow old. I shall be miserable, or happy; a wordy sentimental creature, or a writer of such English as shall one day burn the pages.[151]

[150] In a letter, Virginia depicts Vanessa as an indiscriminate flame that "transmutes" those around her (*Letters*, I, p.309).
[151] *Letters*, I, pp.298—299.

A wealth of things might be commented upon here, but I want to stress that Virginia does not know her place among her family – which includes both figures of the past, the Duckworths and Stephens, and the present, the Bells – and her conviction that she 'might pour out the English language' and not succeed in 'making a coherent story' of her family. Amidst her manuscripts, letters, and family scripts she is uncertain of whether she will be 'miserable, or happy', and what kind of literature she will produce. Considering that the first family script that followed these concerns was the 'wordy sentimental' 'Reminiscences' describing the plight of 'stirring young creatures', perhaps she deserves our sympathies (16). The young Virginia Stephen felt the need to shape her family in her writings so that she might place herself in it, since a feminine subjectivity inevitably evolved within the family frame. Her letter, like 'Phyllis and Rosamond' and 'Reminiscences', tentatively wonders about the possibilities of writing one's family scripts, and cautiously imagines the kind of prose a coherent family story might produce. For its author, these hybrid texts, with their depictions of idolised and unsettling sisterhoods were required steps in becoming 'a writer of such English as shall one day burn the pages.'

Shortly before Vanessa received the manuscript of her life, she wrote to Virginia, asking a question which foreshadowed the problems of 'Reminiscences' and other future works: 'are you too much engrossed in me as a subject for your art to be able to think of me in the flesh?'[152] Vanessa, with good reason, reminds her sister that her artful depictions of her do not equal her actual existence. This concern and the discrepancy would follow Virginia's fictionalised uses of her sister, but they were also in constant danger of disappearing due to the forcefulness of her Vanessa images. Indeed, Virginia's engrossment in her sister as a subject for her art came to influence both their relationship and Vanessa herself.

This chapter has identified a number of ways in which textual sistering functions. I have demonstrated the Stephen sisters' creative maintaining and manipulation of their shared herstory and how these imaginative elements – from wish-fulfilment and projection to narration and characterisation – were employed both in explorations of alternative sororal spaces and in manoeuvring sisterly identities. This lays the foundations for analyses to come. In particular, this chapter has shown that the indeterminacy of sororal identities and practices helped to deliver the sisters from their past and enabled Virginia's transmutation of that past into writing, fictional and auto/biographical alike. 'Phyllis and

[152] *Selected Letters*, p.59.

Rosamond' – by multiplying and serialising sororal identities – and 'Reminiscences' – by fusing two into one – illustrate that in imagining sisters and sisterhood, both the productive strength and the difficulties arise from the plurality at stake. Virginia's employment of the sister trope evinces the primary troubles that siblings face in coming to terms with one who is same but different; the sister can be used to suggest oneself, but the deep ambivalence of the analogy only begins to dawn in these texts. Nonetheless, they use the unfixed and plural nature of sisterly positions to help define social life and individual roles in it, like those of oneself, or mother. Yet, at this early moment in Virginia's textual creation of her sister relationship, there is little realisation of the sister's otherness, which 'Phyllis and Rosamond' cannot verbalise and which 'Reminiscences' omits in favour of cosy sameness that pictures the sister as 'more of me' and yet shows symptoms of struggling with her difference.[153] Tributes to and records of sisterly intimacy, these texts are also sites of actual sistering: as a part of Virginia's sistering of Vanessa, they are acts of both adoration and restriction, exploring the possibilities of lateral organisation and uncovering the difficulties at the foundations of sororal love.

[153] Mitchell, p.65.

CHAPTER 2. 'INTRUDING UPON YOUR CIRCLE OF BLISS': KINSHIP AND ITS RUPTURE IN *THE VOYAGE OUT* AND *MELYMBROSIA*

This chapter stays with the troubling aspects of Virginia and Vanessa's relationship. It offers a reading of *The Voyage Out* (1915) and its earlier version *Melymbrosia*, exploring instances of sororal intimacy, eroticism and violence. I set *The Voyage Out* and its composition within its contemporary autobiographical context, and argue that in addition to reflecting the events of the sisters' herstory, the novel was also the performance site for aspects of Virginia's sistering of Vanessa, in particular sororal eroticism and violence. I begin by proposing that the intertextual presence of *Antigone* in Virginia's novel both encourages a sibling-oriented reading of it and resonates with Butler and Mitchell's reconfigurations of kinship. Analyses of Helen Ambrose as a portrayal of Vanessa explore the maternal, sororal and artistic implications of her character as a portrait of an elder sister, who is accused of having become complicit in patriarchy due to her marriage. As in Chapter 1, the sororal is tested as an alternative space for organisation of social life, and I suggest that *The Voyage Out* simultaneously longs for and hints at the possibilities of women's homosocial kinship, and dejectedly disappoints in them. Indeed, after a consideration of private sororal intimacy and eroticism, I will propose that *The Voyage Out* and *Melymbrosia* demonstrate that, like love, the violent impulse and the possibility of rupture define sisterliness. This chapter, then, faces lateral kinship in its most excessive and difficult form, and aims to complicate the relevant biographical narrative and to unearth an interpretation of Virginia's first novel that realises sisterly pain, love, and hate.

In October 1907, about half a year after Vanessa's marriage, Virginia wrote her a quick note, addressing her as 'Beloved' as usual, and lamenting the fullness of her schedule: 'God knows if I shall see you. O misery. But why should I intrude upon your circle of bliss? Especially when I can think of nothing but my novel.'[1] Here, Virginia juxtaposes her potential act of intrusion into Vanessa's married life with her newly-begun first novel that would become *The Voyage Out*. This is a contrast that Virginia frequently employed shortly after Vanessa's wedding: Vanessa would have her married happiness; Virginia would be 'a virgin, an Aunt, an authoress'.[2] Her juxtaposition does, however, also suggest that in some ways 'intrud[ing] upon [Vanessa's] circle of bliss' was linked to her novel.

After the Stephens' move to Bloomsbury, Virginia's hopes and energies had been 'centred on her life with Vanessa, her work and her determination that this life should

[1] *Letters*, I, p.316.
[2] *Letters*, I, p.311.

continue unchanged', as Dunn writes.[3] Indeed, '[a]s long as she could live with Vanessa, Virginia saw no reason at all for marriage. [...] But in order to counteract her feminine fate and evade matrimony, Virginia needed Vanessa's wholehearted conspiracy in the matter'—which she did not obtain.[4] Following the wedding, she felt a sense of trauma: 'I dont much realise what has happened. Still it would have been unbearable if she hadn't married. I dont get reconciled to anything.'[5] Virginia had a hard time accepting Vanessa's married 'bliss': she wrote to Violet that she would 'want all my sweetness to gild Nessa's happiness. It does seem strange and intolerable sometimes.'[6] To begin with (and to some extent this opinion would last), she thought disparagingly of Clive—'The general opinion seems to be that no one can be worthy of [Vanessa]', as she let him know.[7] At times she tried to be appreciative of the very visible evidence of her sister's happiness, and at others she was ridden by a deep sense of loss. Repeatedly, her letters feature contradictory attempts to assure her correspondents – and herself – that the marriage would not change anything between the sisters alongside declarations like that it would be 'dangerous' to live in 'the same square' or street with the Bells.[8]

In any case, Virginia felt that following Vanessa's marriage, 'of sister there is less than there used to be'.[9] In her desperation to regain something of the lost intimacy and possibly as an act of revenge, Virginia began a flirtation with Clive, which meant breaching Vanessa's trust. These ruptures in the sisters' relationship were fed into *The Voyage Out*, which, as a novel about a young woman, indeed does not 'get reconciled to anything.' By approaching *The Voyage Out* in this way, I read ruptures and violence as an inherent part of the novel's vision of sisterhood. Like Butler and Mitchell, whose configurations of kinship I follow here, I begin to think about siblingship through *Antigone*.

THE *ANTIGONE* ALTERNATIVE

> 'I own,' [Mrs Dalloway] said, 'that I shall never forget the *Antigone*. I saw it at Cambridge years ago, and it's haunted me ever since. Don't you think it's quite the

[3] Dunn, p.99.
[4] Dunn pp.95—96.
[5] *Letters*, I, p.285.
[6] *Letters*, I, p.273.
[7] *Letters*, I, p.268.
[8] *Letters*, I, p.265.
[9] *Letters*, I, p.307.

most modern thing you ever saw?' she asked Ridley. 'It seemed to me I'd known twenty Clytemnestras.'[10]

At the beginning of the 24-year-old Rachel Vinrace's voyage out, the group on board her father's ship *The Euphrosyne* are joined by Mr and Mrs Dalloway, each of whom plays a part in introducing the young woman to the ruling ideas of marriage and possible relations between men and women. Before Mrs Dalloway brings up *Antigone*, there has been a 'decidedly uncomfortable' pause after a tense exchange between her and Helen Ambrose, who is Rachel's aunt as a wife to her dead mother's brother (V44).

The *Antigone* reference points to the play's lateral kinship troubles and their resonance in the novel. It is mentioned in connection with Cambridge, where both Virginia's brothers were educated, and it is, rather appropriately considering the heroine is half in love with death, also linked to haunting. Furthermore, the emphasis on *Antigone*'s modernity is striking – it is 'quite the most modern thing' anyone at the dinner table would 'ever' have seen – and the modernity is underlined all the more by *Antigone* being juxtaposed with 'twenty Clytemnestras', another classical Greek heroine, a mother and wife, who murdered her husband Agamemnon in revenge for his sacrificing their daughter. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, among others, interprets Mrs Dalloway's shift from Antigone to Clytemnestra as a demonstration of her '*not* knowing Greek', which it might indeed be, but Virginia's juxtaposition of the two heroines is not accidental; as Kolocotroni observes, the passage 'conjures up an ancient motif of conflict: Clytemnestra vs. Antigone; wife vs. maiden'—which, from my point of view, looks like mother vs. sister.[11] Even if by accident and with a marked contrast to her own position as a matriarch, Mrs Dalloway suggests there is something perturbingly timely about Antigone, who doubly fills the familial role of sister: she is sister to Eteocles, Polyneices and Ismene, but she is also sister, although this aspect of the relationship is often ignored, to Oedipus, her father.[12]

Mitchell points to this forgetting in *Siblings*: 'We completely forget that Oedipus and his children are brothers and sisters.'[13] She takes 'this as a metaphor for [...] the suppression of the significance of laterality – of siblings, and their successors, peers and

[10] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, ed. by Lorna Sage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.44. Further references will appear in the body text with a 'V' in contrast to 'M' for Virginia Woolf, *Melymbrosia*, ed. by Louise DeSalvo (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 2002).
[11] Vassiliki Kolocotroni, '"This Curious Silent Unrepresented Life": Greek Lessons in Virginia Woolf's Early Fiction', *The Modern Language Review*, 2 (2005), pp.315—316.
[12] *Antigone* resonated deeply with Virginia, and she made use of it in her anti-war polemic *Three Guineas*. While a number of critics have discussed *Antigone*'s relevance to *Three Guineas*, only Emily Dalgarno's *Virginia Woolf and the Migrations of Language* (2012) offers a reading interested in siblings.
[13] Mitchell, pp.32—33.

affines – from a psychoanalytic understanding of the construction of psychic life.'[14] Arguing for a paradigm shift from the vertical to the lateral, Mitchell demonstrates that '[l]ooking at siblings is looking anew at sex and violence', which can revolutionise 'the picture of social organization'.[15] She locates sibling love and hate, sexuality and murderousness, at the very heart of *Antigone*, 'the play of siblings'.[16] Butler, also, takes Sophocles's play as the potential source for reconfigurations of kinship; she refers to the same paradigm shift as Mitchell, when she asks 'What would happen if psychoanalysis were to have taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?'[17] Butler proposes that ambiguity would have ruled the construction of kin relations: '[t]he terms of kinship become irreversibly equivocal', because Antigone does not represent 'the normative principles of kinship, seeped as she is in incestuous legacies that confound her position within kinship'.[18] For Butler, Antigone points 'to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed' and therefore Antigone may be 'the occasion for a new field of the human', which happens when 'kinship founders on its own founding laws'—those that emerge from Oedipus.[19] *Antigone*, then, signals alternative kinship figurations and constructions that exist laterally and within which, as Mitchell observes, '[v]iolence and sexuality', or 'acts and emotions of sex and of murderousness are *for the same person*' unlike in the conventional Oedipal dilemma.[20]

Mrs Dalloway's early summoning of Antigone establishes Sophocles's play as an intertextual frame for Rachel's story and its (d)evolution in *The Voyage Out*. Reading the novel within this framework is also encouraged by the many parallelisms between the heroines: Antigone is '*entre-la-vie-et-la-mort*', as Jacques Lacan identifies her limbo-like existence, and so is Rachel.[21] The fate decreed to Antigone by Creon, being buried alive, presides significantly over the chapter in which Rachel dies; Antigone is associated with the underground as Rachel is with the underworld; and the vault of Rachel's nightmares is not unlike the cave where Antigone dies. Moreover, Rachel's death results in a deinstitution of heterosexuality and normative marriage similar to Antigone's refusal 'to do what is necessary to stay alive for Haemon, by refusing to become a mother and a wife', to cite

[14] Mitchell, p.33.
[15] Mitchell, p.xvi.
[16] Mitchell, p.31.
[17] Butler (2000), p.57.
[18] Butler (2000), p.57, 2.
[19] Butler (2000), p.2, 82.
[20] Mitchell, p.35.
[21] Quoted in Butler (2000), p.50.

Butler.[22] Already these elements point to *The Voyage Out*'s attempts to define alternatives to vertical kinship structures, and, as in the case of Antigone, the endeavour feels ill-fated.

Louise DeSalvo, who carried out notable editorial work on *The Voyage Out* and published an earlier version of it as *Melymbrosia*, which was Virginia Stephen's original title for the book, has also commented on this eerie presence of *Antigone*.[23] In her account of the changes made during the novel's development, DeSalvo accounts for the alterations by demonstrating that the changes 'parallel the changing events in [the author's] life'.[24] She notes that in earlier versions, Mrs Dalloway is unable to forget *Agamemnon* and that changing it to *Antigone* was a rather late modification. When the *Antigone* reference was added, DeSalvo argues, the facts of Antigone's life corresponded to the facts of Virginia's life: her 'mother, father, and brother (in addition to her half-sister Stella Duckworth) were dead.'[25] Stella had died very shortly after her marriage in 1897, when Virginia was fifteen, and Thoby, whom both Virginia and Vanessa adored, died in November 1906 of typhoid fever – the medical cause of Rachel's death – which he contracted during the Stephen siblings' holiday in Greece.[26]

Despite these hardly incidental similarities between Rachel's and Stella's and Thoby's deaths, DeSalvo and others have, in a rather Oedipally-oriented way of reading, used *Antigone* to emphasise Virginia's parental relations.[27] This, to me, seems to misrepresent the focus of the play and the slant *Antigone* as a frame offers the novel, which merges the deaths of two siblings in the death of an autobiographical protagonist. Additionally, Mrs Dalloway's references to both haunting and Cambridge, her insistence on the play's modernity, and the fact that *Antigone* was in circulation among the Bloomsbury Group, all suggest the significant topicality of the allusion and support an emphasis on the alternative paradigm of kinship found in *Antigone*, or seriality. Mitchell imagines this other possibility: 'Instead of *Oedipus Rex*, we will have *Antigone*', she writes and proposes an

[22] Butler (2000), p.76.
[23] *Melymbrosia* presents the novel as it would have been, if published in 1910.
[24] Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980), p.155.
[25] DeSalvo, p.155.
[26] Thoby's fate haunts especially the early drafts of the novel: in *Melymbrosia*, Greece is evoked as 'hopeless; a land full of malaria' and a couple of pages later typhoid is mentioned (M108, M113).
[27] DeSalvo proposes an emotional echo between Virginia's flirtation with Clive (and Vanessa) and 'the trigonal relationships in her childhood, particularly that of Virginia, Vanessa, and George Duckworth, or that of Virginia, Vanessa, and Thoby Stephen'. Whilst I reject this kind of comparison between these two sibling triangles, her focus here, at least, is still on siblings. Not so in how she continues this line of thought: 'The earliest drafts of *Voyage* certainly explore and record what it feels like to become involved in such emotional triangles, and, even more importantly, what it feels like to re-experience that original triad of mother, father, and daughter.' (p.155)

"Antigone complex", which 'implicates power, violence, love and hate' and 'Antigone's law' by which siblings are 'different but equal'.[28]

These, then, rather than the Oedipal dyads and triads, interest me in *The Voyage Out*, and in its younger older sister *Melymbrosia*, and so suggest a new way of reading the novel by paying attention to the lateral autobiographical insinuations that the presence of *Antigone* generates in the novel and its sidelong predecessor. My use of *Melymbrosia* is based on a readiness to permit a kind of seriality in my method: rather than seeing *Melymbrosia* as 'some sort of origin or Ur-text that explains the whole of the published novel', I am persuaded by Benjamin Hagen's impression of DeSalvo approaching *The Voyage Out* 'as a shape-shifting text in concert with and sensitive to the equally shifting lives of Woolf and her intimates'.[29] Hagen argues that this encourages reading Woolf's text 'as a fundamentally dialogic text, one that converses—explicitly and immanently—with and among other texts [...] and with *itself*, modifying itself over and over again in a variety of striking ways.'[30] This to me emphasises the dialogic relationship between *The Voyage Out* and DeSalvo's *Melymbrosia*, which, in addition to the fact that they are literally occasions within seriality (they are 'more of me', or 'both the same and different', to borrow some of Mitchell's phrases) makes them particularly felicitous for a study of sisters.[31] I am likewise convinced of the interactive potential in the novel(s) and *Antigone*'s intertextual relationship, which in a Kristevan understanding of the connection is both discursive and uncertain, and fittingly '"foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence"'.[32]

INTRUDING: THE SISTERS AND CLIVE

In her considerations of *Melymbrosia*'s development in 1908—9, DeSalvo lifts one aspect of its author's life above others: '[t]he single most important emotional event during this stage of the novel's composition was surely Virginia Woolf's and Clive Bell's "violent and prolonged flirtation."'[33] Whilst I also situate the flirtation at the novel's autobiographical, emotional core, I think the perspective DeSalvo takes on this relationship may be improved by maintaining a firmer connection to Virginia's motivations for entering the flirtation,

[28] Mitchell, p.128.
[29] Benjamin Hagen, 'Furthering the Voyage: Reconsidering DeSalvo in Contemporary Woolf Studies', in *Personal Effects: Essays on Memoir, Teaching, and Culture in the Work of Louise DeSalvo*, ed. by Nancy Caronia and Edvige Giunta (Fordham University Press, 2015), pp.140—152 (145).
[30] Hagen, p.145.
[31] Mitchell, p.65, 76.
[32] Graham Allen quoted in Elaine Martin, 'Intertextuality: An Introduction', *The Comparatist*, 35 (2011), p.148.
[33] Quentin Bell quoted in DeSalvo, p.13.

which have to do with her sister, and to the fact that the triangularity echoed the sisters' lost relationship with Thoby. After Julian's birth, both Clive and Virginia felt ousted from their special place in Vanessa's affections and were drawn together, beginning a mostly, and possibly exclusively, non-physical flirtation with one another.[34] Their relationship was, first and foremost, triangular, with Vanessa in the strange position of the initially desired companion and the third wheel.

The correspondence between Virginia and the Bells from this time suggests that Virginia's primary incentive was to re-engage Vanessa's attention, and that the real target of her affections was her sister; as Lee states, '[t]he most insistent erotic demands in this relationship passed, via Clive, from Virginia to Vanessa.'[35] Repeatedly, Virginia demanded Clive to 'Kiss Dolphins nose', 'Whisper into your wife's ear that I love her', and 'Kiss her, most passionately, in all my private places—neck—, and arm, and eyeball.'[36] But in addition to kissing, Clive was to 'tap pony smartly on the snout' and in other ways reproach her, reflecting Virginia's feelings of bitterness and longing.[37] As Lee writes, such 'coyly aggressive erotic messages' were 'as revengeful as they were loving.'[38] If we insist on the primacy of Virginia's attachment to Vanessa and identify it as the foundation of the triangle, the autobiographical reflections that DeSalvo traces in the novel may be examined from an altered perspective, more 'slantwise', which rectifies the omissions of relationships not based on marriage or heterosexual attraction, which were, after all, peripheral elements in Virginia's flirtation with her brother-in-law.

Analysing the difficult emotions involved in a sister relationship, Kuba recounts stories of sisters' competition, which in adolescence often manifests in rivalry 'for male affection': it is typical that sisters 'compete for the same boyfriends'.[39] Sisters' feelings of 'fear, guilt, jealousy, conflict, and alienation', then, are part of the emotional framework for interpreting and reacting to each other's life-events, and though often repressed, such negative emotions are an indelible aspect of sister relationships. Garnett, contemplating her

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[34] Lee observes that Virginia's pleasure at walking and talking with Clive can be sensed in the discussions between Rachel and Terence Hewet, aspects of whom are based on Clive (p.248).
[35] Lee, p.249.
[36] *Letters*, I, p.362, 325.
Garnett recalls the rites which pertained to her aunt's visits: coming to Angelica and Vanessa, 'crouch[ing] beside us', 'she would demand her rights, a kiss in the nape of the neck or on the eyelid, or a whole flutter of kisses from the inner wrist to the elbow, christened the Ladies' Mile after a stretch of sand in […] Hyde Park, where Vanessa in the past had ridden on a horse' (Garnett [1995], p.107). These 'rights' correspond to 'all my private places', showing that the ritualistic display of affection Virginia demanded from her sister preceded her marriage to Clive and continued long after the flirtation.
[37] *Letters*, I, p.362.
[38] Lee, p.250.
[39] Kuba, p.69.

mother's and aunt's relationship, declares that the flirtation 'was an episode that left behind a permanent scar.'[40] She offers her view on the consequences of the affair:

> Years later, seeing them together, in spite of their habitual ironic affection and without any idea of the cause, I could see in their behaviour a wariness on the part of Vanessa, and on Virginia's side a desperate plea for forgiveness. This attitude had not arisen out of the blue; it was evidence of an incident which, though long past, could not be forgiven because it had not been fully acknowledged. Both sisters had frozen into attitudes which they found painful and which prevented the normal flow of feeling.[41]

Whilst I would be cautious about assessing the 'normalcy' of the feelings flowing between the sisters – somewhat in opposition with Garnett's impression of coldness, Lee suggests that the flirtation led to the sisters' 'feelings towards each other becom[ing] more explicit' – I do find persuasive Garnett's stress on the pain induced by the incident.[42] Even in 1925, Virginia associated it with pain: 'my affair with Clive and Nessa […] For some reason that turned more of a knife in me than anything else has ever done.'[43] Her recollection emphasises once more the fact that she 'remembered it as "an affair with [both] Clive and Nessa"', as Reid notes.[44] Virginia's metaphorical knife is probably one of guilt, which her niece also detected in her behaviour; the affair would have turned a different kind of a knife in Vanessa, whose pain, it seems, was never 'fully acknowledged' and apologised for by her sister. Virginia's involvement with Clive was initiated by her hurt at being excluded from her sister's 'circle' of married 'bliss', but it wounded Vanessa and instigated a rupture in the sister relationship—which in Virginia's view had already been disrupted by Vanessa's marriage.

Vanessa's early work, too, has been interpreted within this context of the triangular relationship and the emotions it triggered. Considering Vanessa's *Iceland Poppies* (1909) and *Melymbrosia/ The Voyage Out* as renditions of the same shared herstory, both works can be read autobiographically as containing sisters' reactions to a brother's death—like *Antigone*. By underlining the emotional triangle producing the tension in *Iceland Poppies* as originally one of siblings, we can emphasise the possibilities of such an alternative to the Oedipal

[40] Garnett (1995), p.28.
[41] Garnett (1995), p.28.
[42] Lee, p.250.
[43] *Letters*, III, p.172.
[44] Reid (1996), p.100.

triangular structure and trace the struggles and ruptures of horizontal kinship in Virginia's novel, too.

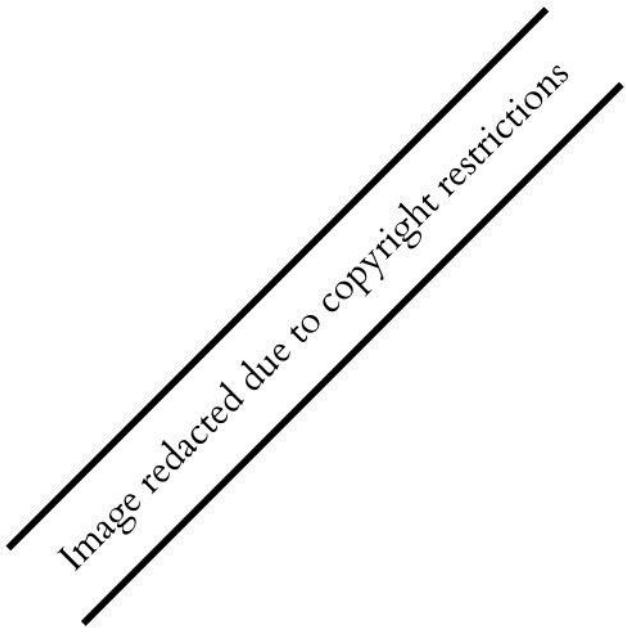

Figure 8. Vanessa Bell, *Iceland Poppies* (1909).

Spalding proposes a link between the artist's life situation – 'a triangular relationship was troubling her' – and the compositional and tonal elements of the still-life *Iceland Poppies.*[45] The composition is founded on triplicates: the triangle of the French pharmacist's jar, the smaller bowl and the green poison bottle is repeated in the poppies on the front, 'two of which are white and slightly separated from the third which is red.'[46] Whilst the regality of the still-life's atmosphere is noteworthy, the viewer is also struck by the single red flower and the tense relationship between the three blooms and their stalks.

The tone of *Iceland Poppies* and hints of pain and tension are intimated by Sellers in her novel *Vanessa and Virginia.* The scene of Vanessa, the first-person narrator, working on the painting may be described as one of the 'moments wherein formal interest coexists with, even arises, from biographical elements', which Layne argues that Sellers illuminates.[47] Sellers' interpretation offers a way into the imaginary subject's private world:

> The third I paint red, the colour spilling from the petals like blood. I do not see any meaning in my flowers. I refuse to say which of them is me or Clive or you. I create

[45] Spalding, p.82.
[46] Spalding, p.82.
[47] Layne, p.84.

> the stems long and slender, lying across the canvas in parallel. I do not allow them to touch.[48]

The bursting sounds of the first sentence accompany the violent image of spilling blood replicating the visual effect of the red poppy, prominent and raw in an otherwise mutely coloured canvas. There is a notable tension between the stalks – Sellers' narrator asks, meaningfully, do they ever touch? – which adds surprising nervousness and rigidity to the still-life, challenging the first impression of calm and control. The rawness of the red flower and its turning away from the other two to face the viewer form the painting's emotional centre, highlighting the importance of painful feelings in an autobiographical reading of Vanessa's work that was composed simultaneously with what we now know as *Melymbrosia.*

Another thematic similarity between *Melymbrosia* and *Iceland Poppies* may be teased out by a consideration of the depicted objects. Propounding that 'the objects in *Iceland Poppies* were carefully chosen', Simon Martin notes that the pharmacist's jar was probably brought to 46 Gordon Square from the Stephens' childhood home, and that 'grouping' the jar with the alabaster bowl and 'green glass poison bottle suggests that the painting has an underlying symbolic subtext relating to medicine and even to death.'[49] With the poppy's association with narcotics, sleep and oblivion, the objects in the painting act as a *memento* not so much of death, but rather of the dying preceding it: the liminal state that involves medics – in the Stephens' experience, often more harmful than helpful – medicine, poison, even feverish sleeps and its chimeric dreams.

Thus *Iceland Poppies* links the dead and dying with the emotional triangles, drawing from the same autobiographical material as *Melymbrosia.* Both *Iceland Poppies* and *Melymbrosia* recall not only the triangle between the Bells and Virginia, but also the Stephen triangle before it: the sisters and Thoby. Thoby's death became inevitably associated with the Bell's marriage since Vanessa, who had repeatedly rejected Clive's proposals in the past, accepted him two days after her brother's death—thus preserving something of Thoby by marrying one of his best friends but leaving Virginia feeling stranded. This increased her association of death with marriage—both consequently featured in *The Voyage Out* as disruptors of women's kinship. To Virginia, Thoby's death introduced a new kind of romantic triangle through Vanessa's marriage, but mostly the loss heightened the importance of the surviving sibling, Vanessa, who had also been ill. Her resulting emotional

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[48] Sellers, p.65.

[49] Simon Martin, 'Before Post-Impressionism: Vanessa Bell's *Iceland Poppies*', *Charleston.org.uk*, https://www.charleston.org.uk/before-post-impressionism-vanessa-bells-iceland-poppies/ [accessed 2.11.2018], 6th paragraph.

pain was then authored into her novel and in particular into the character inspired by her 'lost' sister.

THE SUBSTITUTE MOTHER, THE OLDER SISTER

Helen Ambrose is Virginia's first novel-length portrayal of her sister. The readers in position to draw connections between the character and Vanessa did do so: in addition to Vanessa herself, Roger and Clive recognised Helen as a portrait of Vanessa—and to them, this version of her was cogently plausible.[50] Clive, who was Virginia's most trusted reader during the novel's first years, wrote lengthy letters of criticism to his sister-in-law, but felt that no criticism was needed when it came to Helen, whom he found the best character by far: "Of Helen I cannot trust myself to speak," he wrote to Virginia, "but I suppose you will make Vanessa believe in herself."[51] Helen, then, like Vanessa, was beyond words, but so real that she would solicit belief even from Vanessa. Clive's words are ambiguous: they could imply that the character would somehow prompt Vanessa to realise her uniqueness, or the implication may be that Helen would be irresistible even to Vanessa, who would have to begin to believe in such portraits of 'herself'.

Shortly after the novel's publication in 1915, Roger and Vanessa corresponded about it at some length. Roger recognised and remarked on the portrait, and Vanessa replied: 'I expect you're right in thinking Helen Ambrose like me in some way though I can't realise it.'[52] She, notably, resisted the full implications of the likeness in a way evocative of, and oppositional to Clive's expectation that Helen would 'make Vanessa believe in herself': she could not 'realise it'. Instead of dwelling on Helen, Vanessa's letter moves on to state her preference for the minor characters, many of whom were based on their friends. So, Dunn is only partially correct when she writes that Helen was 'accepted by both Virginia and Vanessa as a portrait in some salient respects of Vanessa'.[53] While the likeness was recognised, it seems to have been slightly resisted, albeit quietly, by Vanessa. It is significant that among those equating Vanessa with Helen were not only her sister, who created the likeness, but also her estranged husband and newly estranged lover. The association iterated and asserted Vanessa's fictionally-enhanced femininity, sagacity, and emotional stoicism.

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[50] In 1919, Vanessa decided to call her daughter 'Helen Vanessa', which she changed after Virginia suggested 'Angelica' (*Letters*, II, p.339).
[51] Quoted in Gillespie, p.191.
[52] *Selected Letters*, p.174.
[53] Dunn, p.88.

But Vanessa is not the only acknowledged model for Helen. The surrogate mother figure also resembles the sisters' mother Julia. Early critics, like George Spater and Ian Parsons, identified Julia in Helen and Virginia's parents as models for the Ambroses.[54] This connection is especially evident in Helen's behaviour towards her husband Ridley; she is the homemaker and organiser of all things practical for the scholarly husband, and, as such, bears more of a resemblance to the idealised Victorian wife of Leslie's *Mausoleum Book* than to Vanessa and her marriage, which, at the time of the novel's composition, was transforming into a very unorthodox arrangement. More complex than a simple biographical conflation, Helen is an example of a confused kinship role, in particular of the (typically elder) sister filling or acting the mother's part. She is in some ways an incongruent character, owing to her origins in two very different women associated with different kinds of social and familial orders, but both of which, in Virginia's experience, had in some way betrayed and forsaken her. Ann Ronchetti – amongst others – distinguishes this synthesised portrait as 'a composite of her mother and her sister', which I think needs to be accounted for in any biographical reading of the character.[55] Virginia's obsession with her mother has received, and continues to receive, much critical attention, and whilst her attempts to portray her mother obviously inform my research – especially since many of these portraits are composites of Vanessa and Julia – I am, again, interested in shifting the focus from the vertical relationship to the lateral. What, in other words, does the maternal do in a portrait of a sister?

As an example of unclear and unstable modern kinship roles, Butler offers the observation that the 'stability of the maternal place cannot be secured': the 'place of the mother' can be 'multiply occupied or displaced'.[56] In her analysis of Antigone's mourning of her brother, Butler recognises a 'decidedly postoedipal dilemma, one in which kin positions tend to slide into one another.'[57] Postoedipal – which we might call Antigonean – kinship, then, is characterised by such sliding roles. Mitchell, on the other hand, locates such blending roles already in the myth of Oedipus, especially in the confusion of mother and sister roles in the legend of the Sphinx.[58] Whether Oedipal or postoedipal, this sliding or confusing tendency of kinship roles is integral to kinship as we can see it enacted both in Virginia's auto/biographical and fictional writings.

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[54] George Spater and Ian Parsons, *A Marriage of True Minds: An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), p.84.
[55] Ann Ronchetti, *The Artist, Society and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.147n6.
[56] Butler (2000), pp.22—23.
[57] Butler (2000), p.67.
[58] Mitchell, p.54.

These sliding kinship roles ought not to be mistaken for merging identities or fluid ego boundaries, although Woolf has often been studied as exemplary of women's relational self-definition.[59] I think these interpretations need to be more nuanced, and occasion for such nuance may already be found in Virginia's earliest accounts of merging female identities: in 'Reminiscences', after an elevated, even exalted, recounting of the relationship she observed between her mother and half-sister Stella, she recognises something unhealthy there: 'It was beautiful, it was almost excessive; for it had something of the morbid nature of an affection between two people too closely allied for the proper amount of reflection to take place between them'.[60] Virginia, evidently, was wary of daughters' identities being subsumed by that of their mother, and yet she seems to have unreservedly longed for someone(s) to fill the mother's role. Women's identities, then, do not directly map onto any kinship roles, and those roles that these women occupy are unsettled; Helen and her relationship with Rachel provide a literary example of a kinswoman, who functions as mother, aunt, sister, friend, lover, nurse, and so on.

The confused and confusing kinship role at stake here is the part of a sister acting like a mother. Sister-as-mother-substitute is a common phenomenon in Western families: according to Kuba, elder sisters especially tend to assume the role, and sometimes the role becomes permanent.[61] A sister is particularly likely to assume this caregiving role if the mother is emotionally unavailable and/or if the other sister is 'ailing or emotionally troubled'.[62] Kuba also argues for the existence of 'specific roles' that are traditionally available to and 'different for sisters and brothers', 'the caretaking mother substitute; and the weak, ill, or socially inept sister' being those imposed on girls and women.[63] Furthermore, Kuba maintains that '[s]isters are most often judged on how well they fulfill the caregiving role'.[64] Noting that mothers are usually assessed according to similar criteria, this insight may shed new light onto the opening of *The Voyage Out*.

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[59] Women's fluid ego boundaries are a central concept in the work of Nancy Chodorow, whose object relations theory of female identity was outlined in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and has influenced theory about women's relations. Whilst I find some aspects of her argument convincing—such as that women's primary bonds are often formed with women rather than men—I am uncomfortable with her take on women's egos, which often, as Judith Kegan Gardiner has complained, lays too much emphasis on women's innate 'niceness' (Wallace, p.48). Elizabeth Abel's *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* offers an example of how object relations theory may be applied to analyse Woolf (and in particular *To the Lighthouse*). A further critical discussion on the disadvantages of this approach in studies of sisters, who are not always 'nice', is found in Wallace, Chapter 2.

[60] 'Reminiscences', p.15.

[61] Kuba, p.361, 75.

[62] Kuba, p.75.

[63] Kuba, p.357.

[64] Kuba, p.357.

The novel begins with the introduction of the Ambroses and, in particular, Helen's grief. Helen's grief, its relation to her children, and the subsequent quick disappearance of both from the narrative have elicited much critical commentary. Marianne DeKoven reads Helen as a 'conventional bourgeois wife and mother', who accepts her married role, yet 'continually evades Ridley himself'.[65] DeSalvo, on the other hand, finds Helen 'an irresponsible and infantile parent'.[66] Whatever approach we take to Helen's introduction as a maternal figure, the opening scenes associate her mothering with failure and absence. In *Melymbrosia*, Helen's sorrow is directly connected to her having to leave her children behind to accompany her husband abroad: 'Tears dropped when the consciousness came over her, like a gust of pain, that her arms no longer closed upon the bodies of two small children.' (M3) Her maternal feeling is a 'physical desire' that is now 'replaced by the memory of the words', and her literal turning away from Ridley suggests that no contact with her husband can replace her loss. *The Voyage Out* leaves out specific memories of Helen's son, and replaces them with a vaguer statement that 'Somewhere up there [...] her children were now asking for her', which, though with less physical acuteness than *Melymbrosia*, defines Helen as an absent mother. (V5) In order to understand Helen's reasons for abandoning her children, we can look back to DeKoven's characterisation of Helen as 'wife and mother'—'wife' comes first. In *Melymbrosia*, Helen's maternal feeling, "[t]he wild animal in her', wants to go back, but is overcome by 'the knowledge that to go back was impossible [...], life being a compromise.' (M3) Helen becomes an absent mother because her husband is her priority.

Considering the Stephen sisters' shared herstory and the ways in which they understood their relationship shortly before and during the conception of Virginia's first novel, it feels inevitable that a character based on Vanessa would have been a mother—and a bad mother. Not only had Vanessa tried to fill the familial role that Julia and Stella had occupied before her, but she was also Virginia's primary caregiver before Virginia's marriage to Leonard in 1912. Vanessa, therefore, acted the common role of the mother-substituting elder sister, and this would be reflected in the number of Virginia's fictional portraits combining features from both Vanessa and Julia, which then again would ease and consolidate real-life impressions of her motherliness. Furthermore, in 1908 Vanessa became a mother, fulfilling one of the potential sources of kinship role confusion acknowledged by

[65] Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.94, 91.
[66] DeSalvo, p.37.

Mitchell: 'sisters can become mothers'.[67] In the sisters' imaginary, Vanessa had of course already been a mother before Julian's birth, as demonstrated by her letters, in which she would frequently address Virginia with pet names, including '[m]y own baby'.[68] The betrayal Virginia felt after Vanessa's marriage to Clive reproduced her experience that Julia's prioritised role as a wife had left her wanting in maternal affection; these emotions frame her depiction of Helen, the bad caregiver. In Virginia's experience, her sister betrayed her in choosing to marry and so the bad sister-mother fails doubly: she fails to care for her little children – her 'own baby' – and her younger sister-like Rachel.

EMBROIDERED FATES

Reading Helen as a mother character is complicated by her outstanding modernity and the fact that she is, like Rachel with her piano, one of Virginia's early female artists, who are typically both social and aesthetic innovators. This is of course appropriate for a portrait of Vanessa, and it both prompts an emphasis on Helen as a sisterly figure and a consideration of the embroidery Helen works on as art in its own right. As Helen divides her attention between the embroidery and G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, she is 'a fictional Vanessa, a paragon of Bloomsbury modernity,' to cite Christine Froula.[69] The embroidered scene is at least somewhat representative – 'a great design of a tropical river running through a tropical forest'– though slightly fantastic, since bananas, oranges and pomegranates would not grow in the same habitat (V30). The colours, like the red in 'the bark of a tree' or yellow in 'the river torrent', are daring, and indeed Elizabeth Gallaher von Klemperer calls them the 'barbaric colors of French *Fauve* painting' (V30).[70] This suggests a further connection between the fictional embroiderer and the real-life model, as Vanessa began incorporating Fauvist influences into her work after the first post-impressionist exhibition in 1910. In the more overtly feminist *Melymbrosia*, Rachel considers Helen's embroidering of "a great picture of a river" (and her own piano-playing) as activities comparable to "Uncle Ridley edit[ing] Pindar" (M160). *The Voyage Out*, too, emphasises the work's creative demand: 'The embroidery, which was a matter for thought, the design being difficult and the colours wanting consideration, brought lapses into the dialogue when she seemed to be engrossed

[67] Mitchell, p.55.
[68] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 22 October 1904.
[69] Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p.43.
[70] Gallaher von Klemperer, 'The Works of Women Are Symbolical', in *Woolf in the Real World: Selected Papers from the Thirteenth International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Karen Kukil (Clemson University Digital Press, 2003), pp.123—129 (125).

in her skeins of silk, or [...] considered the effect of the whole.' (V233) This endeavour of "ordering the parts and perceiving the whole" was established as a post-impressionist aesthetic aim already by Josephine Schaefer, but further links between the embroidery and Vanessa may yet be highlighted.[71]

The changes Virginia made to her manuscript(s) reflect her evolving aesthetic attitudes, which transformed along with Vanessa's increased involvement with post-impressionist experimentation. The revolution of style is remarkable in Vanessa's art between 1909 (see *Iceland Poppies*, p.96) and 1911/12, when she was preparing work for and exhibiting in the second post-impressionist exhibition. Virginia followed along, albeit less rapidly. Whereas *Melymbrosia* reflects some of her initial reservations about modern painting as Rachel considers Mrs Flushing's painting of 'gaudy colours' and 'abrupt shapes' and finds it 'oddly like the painter' and does not mean this a compliment (M242), *The Voyage Out* treats the equally strangely coloured and bold jungle image much more neutrally as 'something brightly coloured and impersonal' (V232). Rachel's awkwardness among Mrs Flushing's 'glow[ing]', 'violen[t]', 'tearing' paintings disappears from *The Voyage Out* (M242), and Helen's observations about the jungle, which has just been likened to a madhouse, are no longer mockery in 1915, but delivered in earnest, so turning madness into an aesthetic: she bids St John Hirst to 'look at the way things massed themselves—look at the amazing colours, look at the shapes of the trees' (V321).

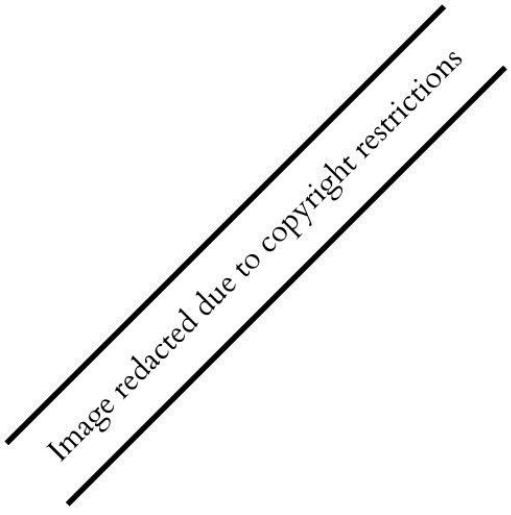

Figure 9. Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, 1911-12.

[71] Quoted in Julia Kuehn, '*The Voyage Out* as Voyage In: Exotic Realism, Romance and Modernism', *Woolf Studies Annual* (2011), p.145fn17.

Similar brash, fauvist colours and increasing boldness mark Vanessa's work during the time Virginia was editing her novel. The jump from *Iceland Poppies* to this portrait of her sister from 1911—12 is exemplary. Besides the stark colours and demonstrative scratches, I find that the face, or the lack thereof, also has to do with a concern the sisters shared. Rebecca Biller, for example, argues for reading the 'blurred, featureless faces' in Vanessa's work in the 1910s as depictions of 'experience as fluid, unstable and marked by a profound alienation.'[72] Remarkably, Rachel's face, which is quite well-defined in *Melymbrosia*, in *The Voyage Out* becomes, in Helen's eyes no less, 'weak rather than decided', and, in painterly terms, has a noticeable 'lack of colour and definite outline' (V15). Helen speculates that anything she might say to her niece 'would make no more lasting impression than the stroke of a stick upon water' and laments there being 'nothing to take hold of' in her, thus emphasising the impression of Rachel, her face and personality being, like Vanessa's featureless faces, 'fluid, unstable' and alienated (V16). Around 1911 and 1912, Vanessa painted a number of such faceless portraits of her sister, as Virginia edited out most of the scenes of explicit connection between Rachel and Helen, and increased the impression of the characters' unknowability and the distance between the two women. Helen's conviction that there is 'nothing to take hold of' in Rachel is based on her characterisation of her niece as a 'girl' emphasising an unsatisfactory experience of instability in intimacy with young women.

Helen's double function as the representative of a possible alternative system of social organisation and as an accomplice of the patriarchal order is embodied in the embroidery, which she works on concurrently with Rachel's education. Critics have established the embroidery as a symbolic weaving of Rachel's fate, Mark Wollaeger commenting on its status as a 'trope', and DeKoven reading it as a signal of 'the promise to the feminine modernist of the passage to the maternal womb.'[73] The budding alterity which DeKoven reads in the needlework and its unorthodox and conspicuous colour choices, though, need not be solely maternal. The grandness of the image ('a great design') and the things it depicts ('masses of fruit', 'giant pomegranates') is highlighted repeatedly and this spaciousness feels hopeful and impressive. (V30) Yet, as in Virginia's other jungle depictions, there is danger amongst the freshness and vitality: the scene pictured is in fact a hunting scene: deer browsing upon fruit, 'while a troop of naked natives whirled darts into

[72] Quoted in 'Spotlight Lectures: Research in the Attic', *The Charleston Attic* (16 March 2016), <https://thecharlestonattic.wordpress.com/tag/portraiture-2/> [accessed 4.1.2019].
[73] Mark Wollaeger, 'Woolf, Postcards, and the Elision of Race: Colonizing Women in *The Voyage Out*', *Modernism/modernity*, 1 (2001), p.52; DeKoven, p.104.

the air' (V30).[74] The jungle, therefore, with its prelapsarian associations, may symbolise an alternative world to the one Rachel and Helen live in, but actually, as Helen's embroidery illustrates, men and their violence rule the jungle, too; as Julia Kuehn observes in her analysis of the embroidery and the native village, 'all women are equally subjected to restricting gender roles'.[75] As Helen puts the finishing stitches to her design during their voyage up the river, Rachel and Terence are doomed to repeat literary history with their own red fruit and fall in the jungle.

Helen and her embroidery are a reworking of the two women knitting black wool at the offices of the Company that sends Marlow on his voyage of discovery in *Heart of Darkness*.[76] This association with the Moirai sisters serves to emphasise the fatefulness that the name 'Helen' – the name that launched a thousand ships – already endows the embroidering figure. It is St John, the Cambridge-educated man, who compares Helen to the ancient Fates, during a conversation about Rachel's character and Helen's married bliss:

> With one foot raised on the rung of a chair, and her elbow out in the attitude for sewing, her own figure possessed the sublimity of a woman's of the early world, spinning the thread of fate—the sublimity possessed by many women of the present day who fall into the attitude required by scrubbing or sewing. St John looked at her. (V234)

Despite the evident comparison, I think that Helen's signifying sublimity must be viewed with scepticism, since, as the narrator notes, such 'sublimity' is possessed by 'many women' in attitudes prompted by their daily, gendered activities—which a man might indeed observe as something otherworldly.

In fact, I find the embroidery fascinating because of the connection it forges between the two women, Helen and Rachel. Although it appears that the embroidery is primarily of Helen's own fashioning, it is worth noting that the jungle vision is one they share. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel is 'beset' by '[v]isions of a great river, now blue, now yellow' and, because 'Helen promised a river', Rachel decides to accompany her aunt and uncle (V93). Virginia uses the same verb, 'beset', to describe Helen's feelings immediately after Rachel's

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[74] The primordial jungle and the garden of Eden, which was related to the jungle in the Bloomsbury imagination, often feature in Bloomsbury visual arts in the early 1910s, especially in the Omega Workshop designs. Evidently, the same alterity evoked in *The Voyage Out* (and in Leonard's *Village in the Jungle*) fascinated the painters with the fantastic possibility of a new Eden. I will return to Eden and the jungle in Chapters 3 and 4.

[75] Kuehn, p.146.

[76] DeKoven calls Helen 'the antithesis' of Conrad's two women (p.104).

decision: she is 'beset by doubts' and 'regret[s] the impulse which had entangled her with the fortunes of another human being', emphasising that, like threads of wool, her and Rachel's fates are now entangled (V93). Their intertwined fates are enacted in the narrative solution of Helen exiting the story as Rachel dies: *The Voyage Out* sees no more of the elder woman after the younger dies.

The beginning of the women's intimacy is marked by the prophetic presence of the embroidered jungle. In *Melymbrosia*, Helen's embroidery is first mentioned during their first confidential conversation. Even in *The Voyage Out*, she keeps at it throughout this meaningful dialogue, in which Rachel tells her aunt of Dalloway's kiss, and Helen explains to Rachel that men will want to kiss and marry her, and that '[t]he pity is to get things out of proportion' (V86). Tellingly, in *Melymbrosia* the embroidery appears as Helen invokes fate: "'I admit" said Helen who had drawn a large piece of embroidery to her and was choosing a thread from many bright skeins,["]that our position is damnable. There are ten of us and ten million Dalloways." (M99) It should be noted that Helen thinks herself and Rachel in the same position, one shared with a handful of others, and that 'damnable' covers both this cursed state and its hatefulness.

Rachel's engagement to Terence – or some man – is inevitable, as it was inevitable that Helen and Rachel's mother Theresa would marry, because marriage is the only successful trajectory available to women. However, as Helen reminds Rachel later, "There's no cure in that [...] I'm alone just as you're alone." (M278) In this way, Helen's lot is the same as Rachel's, loneliness. This central relationship of Virginia's first novel is indeed not only characterised by the women's conviction that "we like each other" (V91), but also by the painful realisation of difference between them, and hopeless attempts of negotiating this distance, and the inevitable estrangements in a social world that sets up heteropatriarchal marriage as the primary relationship in a woman's life, alienating women from one another, as it had alienated Vanessa from Virginia. The embroidery does not only signify Helen's role in leading Rachel towards the inevitable, but it also signals the shared nature of the women's fate; Rachel is enchanted by the vision's deceptive look of alterity, but Helen, due to her complicity, knows more about this pattern of life and what to expect.

MONUMENTALISING LOVE

The vision of the woman engaged in needlework grows to be paradigmatic in Virginia's work as a figure gazed upon with longing desire. Some critics, struck with the ominous correspondence between Helen's needlework and Rachel's fate, have endowed Helen with

'godlike creativity', to cite Gallaher von Klemperer, which, taking into account the many admiring passages in the novel, is an understandable reading, though more optimistic than the one I have offered, which doubts the reach of Helen's influence.[77] I believe that associating her with the Fates, and other divinities, is not so much an expression of her power as of her unattainability. At the novel's opening, Helen is linked to the Virgin Mary through her billowing blue robes, and for example Madeline Moore and Lisa Tyler have identified Helen as the Greek goddess Demeter, who cannot save her daughter Persephone from the (under)world of men.[78] The novel's opening immediately immortalises Helen, appropriately for a Greek goddess, as statue-like: her eyes are 'fixed stonily' and she stands 'quite still, much longer than is natural' (V3, V4). Rachel and Terence, like the narrator, are partial to viewing Helen as statuesque: in *Melymbrosia*, she appears to them as 'vast and profoundly mysterious' (M309), and, in *The Voyage Out*, as 'almost featureless and very large' (V336). While these descriptions highlight Helen's Vanessa-like beauty and tallness, they are also dehumanising, and it is no wonder that Rachel, dissatisfied with her perceived lack of understanding between herself and Helen, accuses her aunt of being "only half alive" (V306). How loving indeed may a gaze, which turns its object into lifeless stone, actually be? Most prominently, these descriptions of Helen's monumentality emphasise her mystery, the distance between her and the onlooker, and her fundamental unreachability.

Of the several attitudes in which the beautiful Helen is observed throughout the novel, her embroidering posture is the one that becomes a repeated trope in Virginia's writing. Sometimes the needlewoman stands (or sits) for female creativity – as in the case of Nurse Lugton whose curtain and its jungle-creatures come alive – but more consistently these knitters are observed through longing, loving eyes. In the scene quoted above, it is St John's longing for a closer connection with Helen that produces the reverent image of a sublime woman, and a scene from *Melymbrosia*, in which Rachel observes Helen, intones similar loving admiration even more explicitly. Rachel has just been struck by 'Helen's face so strange in the lamplight' (M269) and she gazes on at 'Helen sitting with her book before her, stitching at the picture of a river; and she saw herself sitting on the ground, saying "Am I in love? I am in love."' (M270) After this, there is an empty line. Whilst a conventional heterosexist reading would deny any connection between Rachel's discovery of being in love and her solemn gazing at Helen, the lesbian framing of this chapter – from the American

[77] Gallaher von Klemperer, p.127.

[78] For further discussion of the Demeter myth, see Madeline Moore, 'Some Female Versions of the Pastoral: *The Voyage Out* and Matriarchal Mythologies', in *New Feminist Essays*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press, 1985), pp.82—104, and Lisa Tyler, 'Mother-Daughter Passion and Rapture: The Demeter Myth in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing', in *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*, ed. by Ruth Saxon and Jean Tobin (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp.73—91.

girl admiring Rachel, to Evelyn Murgatroyd and Miss Allen – undeniably encourages noting the link. Furthermore, the following chapter, 23, contains an explicit confession of love from Rachel to Helen.[79] In chapter 22, the scene with Helen and Rachel follows a conversation between Miss Allen and Rachel, in which the spinster explains to Rachel that "[a] sister is a good sort of relationship"; Miss Allen's and her sisters' relationship does not correspond to Rachel's ideas about what a sisterhood should be like ("you say everything to them"), but the exchange brings to the fore Rachel's longing for such a relationship as well as the question as to what one says to one's sister (M266). This is echoed in Rachel's confession a chapter later: 'Now I shall say the things one never does say.' (M278)

In the end, *The Voyage Out* did not say these things explicitly and the pose of Helen stitching and Rachel sitting at her feet did not survive into the published novel, but it did live on in new guises in Virginia's later works. This is the attitude in which Peter Walsh finds his impossible love-object Clarissa Dalloway after he returns from India, and so is the dead Mrs Ramsay depicted in *To the Lighthouse*, 'flick[ing] her needles to and fro', as Lily Briscoe cries after her.[80] There are interesting verbal echoes between these scenes. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) famously ends with 'For there she was.' after Peter has been fretting after her; the paragraph with Lily shouting "Mrs Ramsay! Mrs Ramsay!" and seeing her on the step ends with similar 'There she sat'.[81] Furthermore, Lily's cry is framed with her 'old horror' coming back ('What is this terror?' asks Peter Walsh): 'to want and want and not to have.'[82] Rachel, too, wants and wants and cannot have: first in the company of Mrs Dalloway: "I want—" (V62) and then in Miss Allen's: "I don't know how to speak. I want—" (M266). All these needlewomen are looked at by characters who love them impossibly—the beloved may be married or dead (or both), but always a woman who awakens in the lover a terrible sense of inexpressible longing and lack. Thus, the monumentalising, adoring gaze that transforms the woman into something as impossible and unattainable as a divinity was originated in Rachel's yearning for something to quell her loneliness which at times is glimpsed at in Helen; indeed '[i]t might be love, but it was not the love of man for woman' (V367).

THE SAPPHIC ALTERNATIVE

[79] "Now I shall say the things one never does say [...] Every day I love you better Helen. It is wonderful that you should now be living. It is not because of anything you do [...] It may be at breakfast, or merely when we're in the room together; suddenly it comes over me: This happiness!" (M278)
[80] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.34; Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.165.
[81] *Mrs Dalloway*, p.165; *To the Lighthouse*, p.165.
[82] *To the Lighthouse*, p.165; *Mrs Dalloway*, p.165; *To the Lighthouse*, p.165.

This painful longing for a loved one takes us on to the novel's representations of women's intimacy—which was, again, what Virginia felt she had lost due to Vanessa's marriage and what she hoped to regain by writing about her. Rachel lives in what is very much a man's world: its rulers are the likes of her father Willoughby – 'a sentimental man who imported goats for the sake of the empire' and 'ruled his daughter' in order to hold on to a 'sense of duty' (M19) – and Richard Dalloway, who explains his notion of being a 'citizen of the Empire' with the image of the 'vast machine ⟦...⟧ thumping, thumping, thumping' (V69). Helen in fact suspects that women are abused in the Vinrace family—'⟦s⟧he suspected him of nameless atrocities with regard to his daughter, as indeed she had always suspected him of bullying his wife' (V20). Certainly, Willoughby's wish that Helen would train a 'Tory hostess' out of his daughter reveals 'the astonishing ignorance of a father' (V93). As I will now suggest, women's intimacy is often implied as a possible alternative to these patriarchal kinship structures, but, as seen in Rachel's upbringing by her two aunts, Misses Vinrace, who have cared for her as "your mother's daughter" and brought her up to believe that '⟦t⟧o feel anything strongly was to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel strongly but perhaps differently' (V34), women often also fail to realise viable lateral and interpersonal alterity.

Throughout the novel(s), Rachel declares her intention to live outside these ruling structures – "I shall never marry" (V62) – and conjures up improbable alternative arrangements: twice she announces that men and women "should live separate; we cannot understand each other; we only bring out what's worst" (V174).[83] As Anne Cunningham observes, these declarations are symptomatic of Rachel's modernist 'desire for alternatives but she clearly lacks knowledge of what those alternatives might be.'[84] In particular, Rachel is reacting to the rift she feels exists between the sexes. Since Rachel's coming-out story ends with her acceptance of marriage and her consequent death, the novel can be read as anticipating 'the recent queer theory critique of a patriarchal heteronormative investment in futurity' (i.e., the production of a child), as Cunningham writes.[85] I believe that the novel evidences the possibility of an alternative to the heteropatriarchal organisation of kinship

[83] These intentions echo Virginia's likeminded proclamation to her cousin Emma Vaughan in 1901: 'I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying—unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven—no human element at all' (*Letters*, I, pp.41—2).

[84] Anne Cunningham, 'Negative Feminism and Anti-Development in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*,' in *Virginia Woolf: Writing the World*, ed. by Pamela Caughie, Diana Swanson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp.180—184 (181).

[85] Cunningham, pp.180—181. This—the production of a child—was of course the stage at which Vanessa's heterosexual marriage was at the time.

that is glimpsed at throughout its margins, but is significantly never realised, and which is potentially both Sapphic and sororal.

Indeed, lesbian critics have offered several persuasive interpretations of *The Voyage Out* as a tentative lesbian novel, and lesbian erotic attachment or its possibility has been located in almost every one of its central female-female relationships.[86] By being women-only relationships, lesbianism and sisterhood inherently embody both otherness from, and alternativeness to, what Patricia Juliana Smith calls 'the "evolved" social institutions of marriage and motherhood'.[87] As I argued in my Introduction, lesbianism and sisterhood have much to tell each other due to their contrariety to vertical and patriarchal social models and their struggles for a language of their own. In Chapter 1 we saw Virginia testing sisterliness as a site of women's intimacy and subversion, and here, I want to expand this line of thought by proposing that lesbian criticism is profitable in analysing Helen and Rachel's relationship, which I continue to read as sororal. Lesbian criticism, I think, helps us to consider the existence of a sororal erotic, which we have already seen epistolary examples of, and which, as Mitchell maintains, is inherent to the relationship.

Already Froula linked the 19-year-old Virginia's 'colony where there shall be no marrying' with the idiosyncratic living in the South American colony in *The Voyage Out*: 'the colony on the Amazon signals hostility to patriarchal marriage.'[88] More accurately, another ancient women's alternative realm is invoked specifically in the novel, namely Lesbos, or rather a Sapphic fantasy of the island. In chapter 17, as Rachel attends the church sermon that leads to her losing her faith, St John reads Swinburne's 'Sapphics'.[89] As Alexandra Peat observes, 'Swinburne's depiction of pagan figures and rituals offers an alternative vision of pre-Christian spirituality'.[90] Lesbos also embodies the Sapphic substitute for Christian brotherhood. This primordiality proposes a similar sense of mystique as that in Helen's

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[86] An interesting example is Kathryn Simpson's identification of lesbian attraction in Clarissa Dalloway's "sidelong glance" at Rachel ('Persuading Rachel: Woolf and Austen's "little voyage of discovery", in *Virginia Woolf and Heritage*, ed. by Jane DeGay, Tom Breckin, Anne Reus [Liverpool University Press, 2017], pp.141—7 [144]).

[87] Patricia Juliana Smith, *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.29.

[88] *Letters*, I, p.41; Froula (1986), p.68. Froula is being rather vague and generous about South American geography. In fact by staying with the Ambroses in the fictional Santa Marina, Rachel opts out of 'wandering on down the Amazons until she reached some sulphurous tropical port' on her father's ship. (V90) However, it is perfectly possible that this association of the all-female Amazon warriors with a vague idea of South America existed also in Virginia's mind.

[89] Swinburne's 'Sapphics' links music to lesbian sensuality, which Virginia, advocating for a colony where one could marry a Beethoven symphony, would have approved of. Rachel of course is a budding musician and Helen declares "I could dance forever!" (V178).
The significance of Swinburne identifying Sappho as a muse and making her a human sister are explored in Joyce Zonana, 'Swinburne's Sappho: The Muse as Sister-Goddess', *Victorian Poetry*, 1 (1990), 39—50.

[90] Alexandra Peat, 'Modern Pilgrimage and the Authority of Space in Forster's *A Room with a View* and Woolf's *The Voyage Out*', *Mosaic*, 4 (2003), p.150.

meditations on Rachel: 'Somewhere in the depths of her, too, she was bound to Rachel by the indestructible if inexplicable ties of sex.' (V233) However, such evocations of an alternative men-less social and erotic life are, though ever-present, borderline and unrealised throughout *The Voyage Out*, suggestive of the bitterness and desperation of the quest of finding viable alternatives to heterosexual marriage.

Some of the minor characters, such as Evelyn and Miss Allen, have also been taken to emphasise the lesbian (im)possibility of Rachel's romantic and emotional development. In the chapter preceding Rachel's engagement to Terence, she visits Evelyn's and Miss Allen's hotel rooms; Smith, in her analysis of the events in these intimate spaces, suggests that both women attempt to seduce Rachel, and, in Simpson's paraphrasing, 'persuade [her] to try something new, to experience something suggestively homoerotic', but as Smith observes, Rachel remains silent and disengaged.[91] In spite of Rachel's unchanging disconnection, the scenes do point to homoerotic and homosocial alternative social arrangements, and, as Jessica Tvordi, who argues that *The Voyage Out* can be read as Woolf's 'First Lesbian Novel', writes, '[t]hese lesbian subplots inform the intensity of Rachel's relationship with Helen Ambrose, [...] thereby allowing Woolf to subvert the heterosexual plot and reveal the novel to be women-centered and lesbian.'[92] Rather like Antigone, who, in Butler's phrase, 'does not achieve another sexuality, one that is *not* heterosexuality', Rachel does not commit to any alternative, but as these subplots hint, one alternative might be born out of a relationship between two women.[93]

WOMEN TALKING IN PRIVATE WITH WOMEN

Kinship between women exists alongside, sometimes inadvertently supporting and sometimes implicitly undermining, the patriarchal structures of social and familial organisation in Rachel's world. Whilst Helen's mentoring of Rachel seems partly responsible for her decision to marry and so exposes Helen's partial complicity in the ruling structures, Helen is also central to the hesitantly fruitful alternatives the novel explores. Especially *Melymbrosia* sets Helen and Theresa Vinrace's friendship as a parallel and a contrast to the women's marriages. Helen has been in the habit of 'comparing her husband with Theresa's husband', a practice presented as inevitable: 'Between friends who marry at

[91] Simpson, p.144, paraphrasing Smith, pp.32—5.
[92] Jessica Tvordi, '*The Voyage Out*: Virginia Woolf's First Lesbian Novel', in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations: Selected Papers from the Second Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993), pp.226—237 (226, 227).
[93] Butler (2000), p.76.

the same time, there must always be these profound comparisons.' (M19) Helen became Theresa's legal kin by marrying her brother, but more importantly, the women's relationship was defined by their comparable trajectories. Such comparison is a typically sisterly practice as Kuba states: 'women often compar[e] themselves to their sisters' both as an attempt to understand the relationship and as a way to 'differentiate themselves.'[94] Moreover, Helen calls 'these profound comparisons' 'the staple of their talk', and as the unusual shift to first-person narration emphasises, these comparisons are also profoundly personal: 'What has life done for me?—for you? For me, […] it has done rather better than for you.' (M19—20) Already these comparisons offer a possible alternative perspective on the women's lives that subverts the centrality of the married pair.

Thinking about her sorrow over losing Theresa, Helen describes the death as an interruption: it brought 'the comparisons' to 'an end' (M20). Their relationship was unique: [t]here was no other woman one could tell things to'; and yet the question 'Rachel—?' following this statement suggests that Helen and Theresa's relationship might in some ways be repeated in Helen and Rachel's, Rachel filling the role that was previously her mother's. Theresa and Helen's sisterly practices of talk and comparison can be detected in Helen's relationship with Rachel, but this new relationship is also haunted by the memory of lost feminine intimacy—some of Virginia's melancholy and what Dunn calls 'acute sense of bereavement' expressed in her complaint 'I shall never see [Vanessa] alone any more' is echoed in Helen's grieving the end of 'the comparisons'.[95]

Especially *Melymbrosia*, temporally closer to Vanessa's marriage and the time before it, suggests that women's practices of talk and comparison are a potential threat to the patriarchal ordering of kinship. So whilst Theresa's friendship with Helen partly paralleled her marriage, it also contrasted it. Willoughby considers the risks of women talking:

> Now Willoughby Vinrace had a great objection to women talking in private with women, and had never left his wife alone with Helen without indicating the hour at which they ought to part. His reason was nothing was ever done as the result of such talks, and that things were said that had better remain unsaid. Action alone justifying talk, it followed that women should be silent, for they seldom do anything. They may talk with cooks, nurses and plumbers, but not with friends. (M101)

[94] Kuba, p.52.
[95] Dunn, p.115; *Letters*, I, p.276.

For Willoughby, women's private conversations are something to be controlled and forbidden. Despite his 'great objection', he is also rather blind to the circumstances that enable and encourage women's talk; whatever he believes Helen's 'making a woman of' his daughter will involve, he does not anticipate the conversations inevitably stimulated by his leaving Rachel in the charge of Helen, for whom '[t]alk was the medicine [...], talk about everything, talk that was free, unguarded, and as candid as a habit of talking with men made natural in her own case' (V93, V137). Willoughby appears to think that women's conversations are both useless and potentially seditious; since in his understanding women – except servants – do not do anything, they ought not to talk, and yet he is possessed by a vague fear of 'things' being said 'that had better remain unsaid' in these conversations, suggestive of their subversive, disruptive power.

The Voyage Out maintains this interest in things that are not said, and during the ball, the homosexual St John and Helen, whom he is befriending because "I feel as if I could talk quite plainly to you as one does to a man", gloss over some censored topics: after "the relations between the sexes", Hirst lists "… and …" as other subjects they can talk about, the ellipses hinting of homosexuality as the love that dare not speak its name (V181). This nod to homosexuality and the allegation that Helen is open to such talk may propose the nature of the things that Willoughby believes 'had better remain unsaid'. Whether or not we read the relationship between Helen and Theresa as a romantic one, it is clear that as a patriarch in a ruling position Willoughby found the intensity of the women's homosocial connection, based on talk and comparison, unfitting and even offensive.

At the end of Helen and Rachel's first confidential conversation onboard the *Euphrosyne*, two important 'facts' have been established: "I can be m-m-myself [...] in spite of you", as Rachel puts it, and that the "twenty years' difference between us" does not prevent the two women from "talk[ing] to each other like human beings" *because* they like each other (V90—1). Helen thus becomes Rachel's bedfellow in her quest of being herself and their relationship is established as a tie of 'consensual affiliation'—which, beginning with Weston, replaces the blood connection as the basis of kinship.[96] Talk, already explored as the staple of Helen and Theresa's relationship, becomes the primary act of this newly affirmed kinship, too. The following exchange makes Helen Rachel's confidante:

> "How difficult—" [Rachel] began.
>
> "To know people?"

[96] Butler (2000), p.74.

"Yes. He kissed me."

Helen drew in her breath. "Tell me" she said. "When was it?"

"It was after the storm. The day before yesterday. He came in to see me, and he kissed me."

"I suspected something" said Helen. "Let's sit down." (M95)

Helen's reaction to Rachel's secret is like that of a friend or sister, who prompts her to "[t]ell me" the details and quickly sits down to discuss the kiss. By founding their relationship on this confidential conversation, Rachel and Helen are enacting Mauthner's belief that '[c]onfiding and reciprocity are key aspects of female friendship talk.'[97] After this conversation, the relationship increases in secrecy; the narrator rarely relates the women's conversations, which intensifies the impression of their privacy. Every now and then glosses of the women's conversational topics provide the reader with ideas of these exchanges.[98] Nevertheless, the reader, like other outsiders, are not completely admitted again to the women's confidential conversational circle, and, as we shall see, outsiders' takes on their talk are fragmented, prejudiced and judgemental.

THE CONSPIRATORIAL ALTERNATIVE

This clash between the women-among-themselves and the outsiders to that intimacy is substantially energised by the women's secrecy, which manifests both in child-like make-believe and in more serious demonstrations of their privacy. Helen and Rachel's relationship is playful; reflecting sisters' roles as childhood playmates, Rachel learns about life through play. The first event described in detail in Santa Marina, which launches the women's acquaintance with the hotel guests including Terence and St John, is one such playful episode. Rachel and Helen go out to "see life": "'[s]eeing life" was the phrase they used for their habit of strolling through the town after dark', which suggests that these observations of life 'after dark'– adult life – are particularly fascinating, slightly forbidden, and enlightening (V107). Being adult women themselves, there is of course no actual practical reason for their mischievous, secretive approach to these strolls; indeed it appears that Helen and Rachel eavesdrop on the hotel guests just for the fun of it. After they get caught – St John mumbles "[t]wo women" to Terence – the narrator observes distantly, '[a]

[97] Mauthner, p.28.

[98] For example: Helen writes to a friend of hers: "Are we really doomed to loneliness, or can we board the souls of others? That is the kind of thing we talk about [...] what is meant by real? Love too. Oh, and religion." (M115)

scuffling was heard on the gravel. The women had fled.' (V112) In a child-like panic, the adult women flee into the privacy and safety of darkness, suggesting a paradoxical element in their behaviour: they act as children caught doing something forbidden. The reader can imagine the childish giggles after the women stop running, but the narrator makes no mention of such, leaving the women in their secretive darkness instead. When later, during their picnic, St John recognises Helen and Rachel as "the two women", the roles the women enact in the public daylight – "I am Mrs Ambrose [...] That's my niece" – are very different from these mischievous playmates (V147, V142). This difference between their private (sisterly, intimate) behaviour and public roles (a married woman and her niece) also frames another instance of playfulness, their tumble in the jungle, which I discuss later.

The above example of a 'phrase they used' and the narrator's explanation of what "seeing life" means to Rachel and Helen suggests a uniqueness in their way of communicating with one another. This suggests to us the question of *how* the two women speak with one another, since it is made clear that they do, and yet as readers we know relatively little of these confidential conversations due to the narrator's selective reporting. A similar re-angling of the question – asking '*how* sisters speak [...], not *whether* they do' – is proposed as part of Bonnie Honig's deeply persuasive re-reading of *Antigone*, in which she argues that 'Antigone conspires with Ismene', her sister.[99] Honig's argument of '*two sisters, two burials*' is supported by analysis of Antigone's *sotto voce* conspiracy with Ismene in front of Creon, and enables a reading of *Antigone* that also values the sororal relationship.[100] Honig ponders: 'like many intimates, plotters, and conspirators, might these sisters have a private language, a coded way of speaking between themselves that eludes the understanding of outsiders?'[101] Speculating the possible meanings of 'Ismene-head', Honig hints that '[s]ororority may be as untranslatable and elusive as the play's famously difficult first line.'[102]

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[99] Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.182, 151.
In chapter 6, 'Sacrifice, sorority, integrity: Antigone's conspiracy with Ismene', Honig close-reads the play for a 'distinctively sororal power' in it (p.156). She suggests, among other things, that there is textual evidence to read Ismene as having performed the night-time burial rite on the body of the dead brother Polyneices and that Antigone's sacrifice, of not denying the deed(s), is therefore not only for the dead brother, but also for the sister who can therefore survive. I find this reading persuasive because it challenges the settled view of Ismene as the sister without politics or agency (which leans on a simplistic categorising of a pair of sisters as 'X' and 'not-X') and because it explains several lines in the play that do not otherwise make sense. It is also worth noting that Ismene admits to having done the deed ('I did it, yes'), but as it is, critics are too taken with hero-worshipping the solitariness of Antigone to pay much attention to a claim that would complicate her obstinacy.
[100] Honig, p.161.
[101] Honig, p.182.
[102] Honig, p.182.

Such secrecy is pertinent to Rachel and Helen's communications in *The Voyage Out*, too: they use phrases that have particular meaning to themselves only, and, more consistently, their tête-à-têtes often occur out of sight and remain hidden from the narrator's, the other characters' and readers' view. In any analysis of Rachel's relationships it is worth remembering that whilst her conversations with the men in her life occupy a central place in the narrative inevitably conforming to the marriage plot, her relationship with Helen often occurs in the margins, rendering only partial knowledge of their intimacy possible—which is why it is important to read between the lines for that which is absent and possibly subversive. This partiality and even absence of knowledge about Helen and Rachel's relationship is accentuated in a consideration of the changes between *Melymbrosia* and *The Voyage Out*, as one of the most notable differences between the two is the latter's toning down of intimate scenes between the women, underlining the unknowability of definite details about their relationship. *Melymbrosia* contains more examples of outsiders, especially men, observing the women's conversations and behaviour with each other; Ridley, for example, makes fun of their discussion, implying that their "nonsense" is inappropriate for "nice domestic Englishwomen", which hints at their talk's potential to disrupt conventional domesticity and points out that to the outsider patriarch it is nonsensical (M214—5).

A scene in *Melymbrosia*, seen through Terence's eyes, exemplifies Helen and Rachel's private language, the intimacy it involves, and its unnarratability. Unbeknownst to them, Helen and Rachel are being observed by Terence, who remains unseen. He watches Helen embroider in the drawing-room and Rachel watch 'the picture grow', until in a gesture of confident closeness, Rachel 'took the needle from Helen's hand' and persuades her to go out by wordlessly pointing to the window (M203). The reporting is sparse and partial, and the narrator makes no attempt to move closer to the women or to explain their exchanges. Terence listens:

> "It's not the wet, it's the toads I dislike" said Helen softly.
> "I saw millions of snakes this afternoon" said Rachel, in the same soft distinct tones.
> "The lights of the hotel" she murmured. They paused looking at them. Then Helen remarked, "How odd to be dead!" "Not odder than this" said Rachel. (M203)

Even in Terence's view, the women function silently, somewhat uncannily in sync. The toads and snakes appear like bad omens without more context than that of being linked to Rachel's moth-like attraction to the hotel's lights, and the women's calm, disagreeing

deliberations of the conditions of being alive and dead—one them orienting towards life, the other towards death. All of the reported conversation feels unanchored: the topics appear strangely unrelated and yet the exchange itself is smooth. Indeed, Rachel and Helen speak to one another 'in the same soft distinct tones', which suggests that they have a particular way, or rather way*s*, if we follow Virginia's distinctive plural here, of speaking to each other: 'tones' which are intimately 'soft' and at the same time 'distinct' and 'the same'. The conversation, like the women's minds, appears to move from one topic to another freely and without any difficulties in understanding or following, and the way in which this ease is reported from Terence's point of observation leaves an impression of immense distance between the observer and observed.

The scene is closed with a rendering of one of Vanessa's memorable poses and a surprisingly passionate gesture from Rachel to Helen, which paradoxically in fact makes us think about distance between the women. Terence observes: 'Helen yawned. She stretched her arms above her head.' (M204) This description recalls Virginia's memory of Vanessa stretching her arms similarly, a pose that became trope-like in her imaginary and symbolised to her the sense of an ending her marriage brought along. In 'Old Bloomsbury', she remembers her wish that 'things could go on like this'—as they were when the Stephens had just moved to Bloomsbury.[103] Then she describes her sister's ominous attitude:

> I was wrong. One afternoon that first summer Vanessa said to Adrian and me and I watched her, stretching her arms above her head with a gesture that was at once reluctant and yielding, in the great looking-glass as she said it—"Of course, I can see that we shall all marry. It's bound to happen"—and as she said it I could feel a horrible necessity impending over us; a fate would descend and snatch us apart just as we had achieved freedom and happiness. She, I felt, was already aware of some claim, some need which I resented and tried to ignore. A few weeks later indeed Clive proposed to her.[104]

Virginia's interpretation of Vanessa's attitude towards marriage is worked into Helen, both her complicit married role and into this particular physical pose: she, like Vanessa, is simultaneously 'reluctant and yielding'. The inevitability recalled here, 'a horrible necessity impending over us', 'a fate' that 'would descend and snatch us apart', is written out in the general story-line of *The Voyage Out*, the main events of which remained the same through

[103] 'Old Bloomsbury', p.52.
[104] 'Old Bloomsbury', p.53.

years of editing. The looking-glass in the above passage and Vanessa's reflection in it capture the difficult and ambivalent connection between the reflected sister and the observing one: whilst a mirror usually reflects a self, and so emphasises Virginia's identification with Vanessa, the phrasing 'I watched her [...] as she said it' highlights the distance between the observer and observed, emanating a feeling of estrangement between them.

In *Melymbrosia*, this estrangement is assigned to Terence, and Virginia instead re-authors this memory of her sister, turning it into a kiss: 'Rachel took advantage of the raised arms to clasp her around the waist and kiss her.' (M204) The kiss is surprising because with Terence Rachel never takes the initiative; this is, however, how Rachel and Helen behave when thinking themselves alone and unobserved. The jealousy of seeing Helen – or Vanessa – being kissed, and the inability of voicing the resulting anger, become likewise re-authored and reassigned to the man in the novel: after witnessing the scene Terence 'crush[es] a leaf for a minute or two in his fingers' (M204). Editing her manuscript, Virginia must have judged this scene inappropriate for her published work, and the women's physical contact is left in more obscurity: 'Apparently Rachel tried to pull Helen out on to the terrace, and Helen resisted. There was a certain amount of scuffling, entreating, resisting, and laughter from both of them.' (V210) Although less explicitly romantic, the women's behaviour still suggests an ease in physical contact, power play, and overall playfulness. Whatever Virginia's reasons for editing out the scenes that depict a romantically tinged relationship between the aunt and niece, the resulting novel continues to contain both acknowledgements of the existence of women's intimacy that is exclusive and private, and careful hints of its alternate possibilities. Nonetheless, the novel also maintains that in the world of the established social conventions, this realm remains somehow inaccessible and removed, underscoring the women's, and in particular Rachel's, loneliness.

NEGATIVE SISTERING AND RUPTURES

Such distance and dissatisfaction begin to draw attention to the fact that Rachel and Helen's relationship, like most sister relationships, is deeply ambivalent.[105] Besides their mutual playfulness and Helen's protectiveness towards the younger woman, prominent negative emotions manifest throughout the novel. Mitchell explores the origins of siblings' emotional ambivalence:

[105] Kuba, p.70.

> But the adored sibling, who is loved with all the urgency of the child's narcissism, is also loathed as its replacement [...]. The sibling is *par excellence* someone who threatens the subject's uniqueness. The ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in one's place.[106]

The sister, then, is loved as an affirmation of one's existence, as one's double, but, as a threat to one's unique existence, she is also the recipient of a plethora of negative emotions. Kuba, too, finds the sororal connection demarcated by 'fear, guilt, jealousy, conflict, and alienation'.[107] As already established, biographical sources propose that Virginia was bothered by feelings of guilt surrounding her flirtation with Clive. Furthermore, as Kuba maintains, sisters' guilt is 'often related to the disconnection from the sister in favor of others'.[108] Kuba sees re-authoring one's life-story as a way of dealing with such guilt, or 'shedding' it, but these attempts of re-authoring often only 'shift the blame to her sister'.[109] *The Voyage Out* certainly does kill off the Virginia character who flirts with the character based on Clive, but the inevitability of Rachel's death highlights the limitedness of young women's options. Helen's ambiguous role as Rachel's mentor links her to this inevitability and makes her, more than any other character, responsible for Rachel's death. Indeed, Helen, or Vanessa, 'did it first': whatever bad decisions the younger woman made in her wake, surely the elder can be blamed for the circumstances.

Jealousy, according to Kuba, is 'a fact of [sisters'] relational lives': 'women just stated that they were jealous of their sisters'; this is also true of Rachel and Helen.[110] During the conversation about Dalloway's kiss, Helen assumes the role of a helper and teacher to Rachel, but she must also be read as a rival to her, and as a contender who is much worldlier and more laid-back than the virginal Rachel. Helen tells Rachel that "I'm rather jealous, I believe, that Mr Dalloway kissed you and didn't kiss me" (V87). She is jealous of the kiss despite the fact that it was unsolicited and left Rachel feeling disturbed and although, as Helen states, "he bored me considerably" (V87). There is no real question of which of the two might get Dalloway – he is already married – just as there is no real competition for the romantic attentions of St John, whose praise of Helen's beauty nonetheless goads Rachel to

[106] Mitchell, p.10.
[107] Kuba, p.67.
[108] Kuba, p.162.
[109] Kuba, p.352.
[110] Kuba, p.155.

wonder 'whether he thought her also nice-looking' (V171).[111] Indeed, such competition for men's attention is rooted in the sororal experience of competing for the same social and familial resources and space. Envy, a close relative of jealousy, also makes recurrent appearances, Helen hinting to the young and emotional Rachel that "you are rather to be envied" (M278).

It should perhaps be emphasised that it is not my purpose to read Helen and Rachel *primarily* as rivals, especially as rivals for men's attentions, since to define a women's relationship thus would be against both my feminist convictions as well as Woolf's. Indeed, her later musings on Cleopatra and Octavia imply that a 'male plot of female rivalry' is often "simplified [and] conventionalised", as Wallace writes.[112] Helen and Rachel's relationship, as we have seen, involves tenderness, care, secrecy, and playfulness, among other things, and the violence between them, which will be the focus of the remaining chapter, exists not due to competition for men, but because sororal intimacy always comprises violence. The jealousy and rivalry are a part of the complicated and ambivalent sisterly relationship that is reflective of Virginia's own experiences, appearing thus not in the professional context of mutually supportive competition, often treated as socially and critically acceptable, but rather in a fictionalised guise which at closer inspection turns out to be vain, mean, and upsettingly personal.

Evidence of ignoble sisterly behaviour embellishes the portrayal of Helen and Rachel's relationship, and in particular Helen repeatedly treats her young kinswoman hurtfully. Throughout *Melymbrosia*, Helen keeps repeating her refrain of Rachel being "[t]he dupe of the second rate!"—the declaration is often accompanied by enthusiastic exclamation points and other similarly gleeful announcements of doom, such as "You're doomed Rachel. There's no escape!" (M100) Helen's meanness is not limited to their private conversations: she also mocks Rachel in front of others, including Terence and St John. Helen does not seem to think her ridicule harmful, indeed she seems to find Rachel's naïveté endearing: 'Again Helen laughed at [Rachel], benignantly strewing her with handfuls of the long tasselled grass, for she was so brave and so foolish' (V161). Helen's 'benign' appearance is silently undermined by the echo of the strangest scene in the novel, the women's tussle, which is recalled by the laughter, the handfuls of grass, as well as Helen's canine simile in the next line: "Oh Rachel [...] It's like having a puppy in the house having you with one—a

[111] *Melymbrosia* explores—or fantasises about—the women's jealousy toward one another more explicitly, for example in a passage describing Helen's feelings of '[t]he inevitable jealousy' 'as she saw Rachel pass almost visibly away into communion with someone else', and in her confession of love which follows directly after. (M302)

[112] Wallace, p.1; see Introduction, p.14.

puppy that brings one's underclothes down into the hall." (V161) The puppy-like tumble, to which I turn soon, is simultaneously an instance demonstrative of the women's mutual playfulness as well as more sinister emotions, which are also present in this conversation with the men. Helen's previous burst of laughter directed at Rachel was prompted by Rachel's answer to St John's question of whether she believes "in a personal God"—at which Helen has 'laughed outright' and said to her, "Nonsense. [...] You're not a Christian. You've never thought what you are." (V161) Helen both derides Rachel's reply to a very personal question and revises it for her, enacting kinship so that the intimacy becomes troubling.

It is no wonder then that Rachel internalises Helen's dominating, bullying voice, and when she feels like she is not navigating her relationships with men as expected, she sees 'the vision of Helen and her mockery before her' and concludes herself "a fool" (V173). Helen's mockery is indeed recognisable as the adolescent behaviour of a bullying elder sister who looks down upon her younger sister with a mixture of pitying endearment and derisive malice. Whilst the Stephen sisters decreed each other plenty of sisterly mockery and what Garnett calls their 'habitual ironic affection', this aspect of Helen's character does not smoothly map onto the manner of treatment Virginia received from Vanessa during the years she was working on *The Voyage Out*, which was, generally speaking, accommodating and complementary.[113] We ought, however, to keep in mind the violence Virginia felt, albeit perhaps hyperbolically, her sister had perpetrated against her by abandoning her and marrying, as well as the increasing pressure Virginia felt, from her sister and others, to marry herself.

According to Butler, 'when we speak about kinship, we are always talking about the possibility of a certain rupture'.[114] In her lecture 'Kinship Trouble in *The Bacchae*', she continues her work on kinship by questioning 'the presumption [...] that kinship lasts and that it endures in a stable form' and notes that 'the possibility of breakage, [...] and even the periodic breakdown [...] inhere in the very practice of kinship.'[115] This offers us a way to think about kinship in Virginia's life during a moment when her sisterly conspiracy seemed to break down as well as in her literary work that deals with the hurtful experiences through reflection and re-authoring. Importantly, accepting the possibility of permanent or temporary rupture as definitive of kinship also allows for the emotional events of the first couple of years of the Bells' marriage to be placed within an understanding of the sisters' relationship, rather than outside it. A motley of events during the composition of *The Voyage*

[113] Garnett (1995), p.28.
[114] Judith Butler, 'Kinship Trouble in *The Bacchae*', UCL Housman Lecture, 8 February 2017, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixwrw0PMC8I> [accessed 12.8.2019], 16:21.
[115] Butler (2017), 19:02, 19:11—24.

Out were interpreted as threats or even breakages of the sisters' bond, by one or the other sister: Vanessa's decision to marry, which in Virginia's view violated their sororal parity; Virginia's flirtation with Clive, which, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter, ruptured the sister relationship; even Vanessa's becoming a mother and thus (again) apparently emotionally abandoning her sister—the autobiographical material that forms the backdrop for the complexities of Rachel and Helen's relationship.

In her lecture, Butler suggests that 'we may only know kinship relations through the breach' and finds, once more, classical Greek texts to exemplify her contentions.[116] Looking at Oedipus as well as Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Butler demonstrates that we often recognise someone as our kin 'only after a certain set of actions have [sic] taken place' and that this 'persuasion usually happens through authoritative narratives'.[117] These narrative enactions of kinship are confused and violent, so that at the moment of kin recognition, 'the outbreak of violent destruction among kin' serves as 'good grounds for firming up the laws of kinship, especially the taboos against murder and incest.'[118] This description of confused and violent enactments of kinship may provide a way of interpreting one of the strangest scenes in *The Voyage Out*, Rachel and Helen's tussle, which I generally read as an enactment of kinship and an embodiment of its author's conflicting feelings for her sister. A close analysis of the scene and its serial versions will aim to demonstrate what Butler sees enacted in the sex and violence of her ancient literary examples: that 'desire, rage and grief define and threaten kinship' and therefore 'what threatens kinship [...] is that the passions on which it depends and which it generates are precisely those that break its bonds.'[119]

THE TUMBLE: SEX AND VIOLENCE

The most crucial scene in the novel, in discussing the ambiguity of Helen and Rachel's relationship, is what critics have collectively come to call 'the tumble scene' in chapter 25 of *Melymbrosia* and chapter 21 of *The Voyage Out*. Elizabeth Heine calls the scene "one of the most powerful and puzzling moments in the novel" and it is one of the most analysed.[120] It is 'simultaneously lesbian, sororal, and maternal', to cite Wollaeger.[121] I am, of course, most interested in its possible sororal interpretations, which are often only peripheral in readings

[116] Butler (2017), 26:23.
[117] Butler (2017), 40:28.
[118] Butler (2017), 1:00:37—46.
[119] Butler (2017), 1:03:42—55.
[120] Quoted in Katherine Dalsimer, *Virginia Woolf: Becoming a Writer* (Yale University Press, 2001), pp.167—168.
[121] Wollaeger (2001), p.64.

that focus on the lesbian erotic or the maternal. Stanford Friedman, in her experiment of reading texts relationally, proposes that the tumble scene may serve as an example of 'reading the horizontal narrative of *The Voyage Out* in relation to its vertical axis in the form of *Melymbrosia*', so that this new reading produces 'another narrative'.[122] Friedman is interested in the maternal, tracing the scene's evolution from a 'site of pre-oedipal, pre-symbolic, and homoerotic desire' in *Melymbrosia* into its new guise of 'oedipal, symbolic, and heterosexual desire' in *The Voyage Out*.[123] Once more, I wish to build from such mother-centred readings, and, recalling Helen's sliding role as both maternal and sororal, to shift the emphasis from the vertical to the horizontal relationship, which is a natural consequence of Friedman's proposed method of relational reading. I read the two scenes, from *Melymbrosia* and *The Voyage Out*, alongside each other, and venture that accounting for this simultaneity will open our understanding of the sex and violence, to use Mitchell's bold title, at the core of the sibling experience in which the tumble scene is rooted.

Evidence from manuscripts shows that the tumble scene went through many variations, and in its final guise in *The Voyage Out*, it survives only as heavily edited. In *Melymbrosia*, the scene begins to roll as 'Helen felt Rachel springing beside her', and '[w]ithout thinking of her forty years, Helen cried "Spring on! I'm after you!"'(M301) Playfully Helen pursues the running Rachel, 'pluck[ing] tufts of feathery blades', throwing them at Rachel, until '[s]uddenly Rachel stopped and opened her arms so that Helen rushed into them and tumbled her over onto the ground.' Helen rolls Rachel around in the grass and in an attempt to make her stop, Rachel confides to her that she is going to be married. Helen pauses 'with one hand upon Rachel's throat holding her head down among the grasses' and shouts:

> "You think I didn't know that!" [...]
> For some seconds she did nothing but roll Rachel over and over, knocking her down when she tried to get up; stuffing grass into her mouth; finally laying her absolutely flat upon the ground, her arms out on either side of her, her hat off, her hair down.
> "Own yourself beaten" she panted. "Beg my pardon, and say you worship me!" (M301)

[122] Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Spacialization, Narrative Theory, and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*', in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. by Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp.109—136 (128).
[123] Stanford Friedman (1996), p.129.

Helen's overbearing force is highlighted by Rachel's vision of 'Helen's head hanging over her, very large against the sky.' Rachel asserts her choice by responding to Helen's demand of worship with "I love Terence better!", of which Helen just repeats "Terence". This echo of Theresa's name brings up Rachel's mother, and the tone of the scene softens, Helen asking if Rachel is happy and clasping her in her arms. 'The inevitable jealousy crosse[s] Helen's mind' and she confesses her love of Rachel, and of Theresa, 'flushing': "I've never told you, but you know I love you, my darling [...] you're so like Theresa and I loved her." (M302) Encircled by Rachel's question of "Why did she die?", the two women sit 'opposite each other'. As their intimate moment draws to an end – they are 'both pressed by the sense that the others were coming near' – Helen closes the scene with "The great thing is love", a recollection of Theresa's enjoyment of life, and a weak whisper "Tell Terence". Rachel 'pull[s] Helen to her feet' as the others arrive, and after telling Terence of her confession, 'with a sudden kindling of their eyes Helen and Hewet shook hands' (M303).

In *The Voyage Out*, many things have altered: all of the women's dialogue is gone and the atmosphere is more threatening and ominous, with '[v]oices crying' and 'grasses and breezes sounding and murmuring' around Rachel—and Terence is now with her at the beginning of the scene (V330). They 'never noticed' the approaching Helen until

> A hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel's shoulder; it might have been a bolt from Heaven. She fell beneath it, and the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears. Through the waving stems she saw a figure, large and shapeless against the sky. Helen was upon her.

Instead of an active Helen, Rachel is passively, though aggressively, '[r]olled this way and that', to the point of speechlessness and near senselessness. Finally she becomes still, and, 'panting', looks up to see 'two great heads, the heads of a man and woman, of Terence and Helen' (V330). They are both 'flushed', 'laughing' and saying something (V331). Instead of a companionable handshake, 'in the air above her' 'they came together and kissed'. Rachel seems far removed from their conversation, but from fragments she thinks they speak of 'love and then of marriage'. Rachel raises herself, and 'sitting up, she too realized Helen's soft body, the strong and hospitable arms, and happiness swelling and breaking in one vast wave.' When the wave of happiness 'f[alls] away', the horizon straightens in Rachel's eyes, the earth appears 'flat' again and trees 'upright'; she perceives the others 'standing patiently

in the distance'. Moments later Mr Flushing leads the English party into the native village.[124]

Despite the significant changes to the manuscript and consequential differences between these two scenes, both easily yield to readings of the lesbian – or in my view, sororal – erotic. In her discussion of the *Melymbrosia* scene and its later typescript versions, Katherine Dalsimer calls the scene 'a passage of fierce eroticism between two women', citing the descriptors 'breathless', 'panting', 'gasping', 'hat off', and 'hair down' as evidence of 'nearly explicit sexuality'.[125] Some of these, such as 'hat off' and 'hair down' are already found in *Melymbrosia*, and others, such as 'panting', survive into *The Voyage Out*. However its author was going to edit the scene, it was evidently to contain some lesbian eroticism. Whilst Helen's confessions of love in *Melymbrosia*, which Jessica Tvordi reads as Helen's "coming out", are lost in the 1915 version, the scene gains a moment of intense physical bliss by the addition of Rachel's 'swelling and breaking' 'happiness', which Simpson persuasively identifies as 'a final peak of seemingly orgasmic pleasure', as Rachel is 'realiz[ing] Helen's soft body'.[126] In spite of this orgasmic imagery, many critics agree with Stanford Friedman's proposition that *The Voyage Out* version is somehow stifled and that '[t]he text Woolf suppressed openly examines lesbian eroticism'.[127]

I would like to suggest, however, that this desire is not so much suppressed, as dispersed and disguised in the later scene: some of the feeling manifests in the orgasmic imagery, and some of the overtness is transformed into the act most generally identified as sexual, the kiss. As Rachel looks up from the grass, she sees '[o]ver her' 'two great heads, the heads of a man and woman, of Terence and Helen', and as if witnessing a rendition of the parental primal scene, Rachel watches them kiss. The sight seems to strike Rachel dumb, and she does nothing for a while; it is telling, however, that the first word after the kiss is '[b]roken'. When she finally sits up, she 'too' is described to 'realize Helen's soft body'. The small adverb 'too' – homophone to 'two' no less – teems with significance: if Rachel, 'too', comes to appreciate Helen's body, the implication is that Terence has already done so. The sentence continues so it is possible to read 'happiness swelling and breaking in one vast wave' as being attributed to Helen and as one of the things Rachel 'too' realises. Indeed the 'too' hints at a discernible erotic exchange between Helen and Terence, and it

[124] I will not discuss the village scene; however, I find Kuehn's interpretation of the encounter with the natives as a realisation of how deeply 'both "primitive" as well as "advanced" societies' are permeated with the same gendered, oppressive maternal and marital practices, generally suits my reading (p.147).
[125] Dalsimer (2001), p.170.
[126] Tvordi, p.234; Simpson, p.145.
[127] Stanford Friedman (1996), p.131.

emphasises Rachel's urgency to grasp these things 'too', so that Terence is not the only one 'realiz[ing] Helen's soft body'.

This confusing emotional and erotic tangle is then evocative of Virginia's position as the sudden outsider to a 'man and woman', or Clive and Vanessa, and her attempts, after an initial shock reaction, to intervene in the Bells' marriage as evidenced in her letters. Furthermore, reading the *Melymbrosia* scene alongside *The Voyage Out*, Terence becomes cast as the replacement of Theresa, whom both Helen and Rachel loved, or a notable loss in the family—a condition also associated with Vanessa's engagement. Most significant, however, is the atmosphere conjured by the heterosexual kiss: one of alienation, disorientation, and distance, which come to underline Rachel's isolation by the end of the scene, but do not undermine the earnestness of the erotic 'swelling and breaking' of Rachel's (or Helen's) wave of happiness. Arguably, the overall depiction of sororal eroticism is more abstruse in this later scene than in *Melymbrosia* where it is overtly articulated, but rather than identifying the difference as a suppression, I want to consider this eroticism as recast in a heterosexual guise, as Virginia's feeling for her married sister did in her letters, and therefore as just one side of the explored primary feeling, the other side of which is murderousness.

Like sexual desire, a covetous violent drive is traceable in both versions of the tumble scene. Smith reads '[t]he savage and erotic violence of Helen's actions' as the manifestation of her 'potent and explosive' lesbian panic; Dalsimer, too, describes Helen's potency: 'In this fantasy, the older woman is an irresistible, terrifying force, powerful and potentially murderous.'[128] Although the *Melymbrosia* scene opens with Rachel's invitation to play and her open, receiving arms, there is something clearly violent in Helen's forceful rolling of her in the grass, which Rachel tries to stop, and, especially in her 'one hand upon Rachel's throat', as she 'hold[s] her head down'. Helen 'knock[s] [Rachel] down when she trie[s] to get up', holds her to the ground and demands: "Own yourself beaten". In *The Voyage Out*, the threat of violence and the accompanying numb terror in Rachel are strongly manifest in Helen's hand 'abrupt as iron' or like 'a bolt from Heaven', the force of which makes Rachel fall 'beneath it' with an effect reminiscent of drowning, as 'the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears'. Although only *Melymbrosia* explicitly mentions Helen's hand on Rachel's throat, both texts describe an experience of suffocation or strangulation. Smith and Dalsimer describe the scene as an 'enactment' (Smith) or

[128] Smith, p.25, 24; Dalsimer (2001), p.170.

'fantasy' (Dalsimer) of lesbian rape, which does indeed reproduce the simultaneity of sexuality and violence that is characteristic of siblingship.[129]

SKETCHING THE FORCEFUL HELEN

In connection with this scene, Dalsimer makes reference to 'a sketch, presumably done by Woolf herself' and found in the 'holograph version of the scene, on the page facing the text'; this drawing, or in fact the two drawings, for there are two on the turn-sides of the manuscript pages, are also mentioned by DeSalvo, who thinks they 'might be renditions of Helen Ambrose'.[130] These sketches and the manuscript pages they accompany provide a striking visualisation of the author's attempt to express Helen's power and the visual traction of the scene.[131]

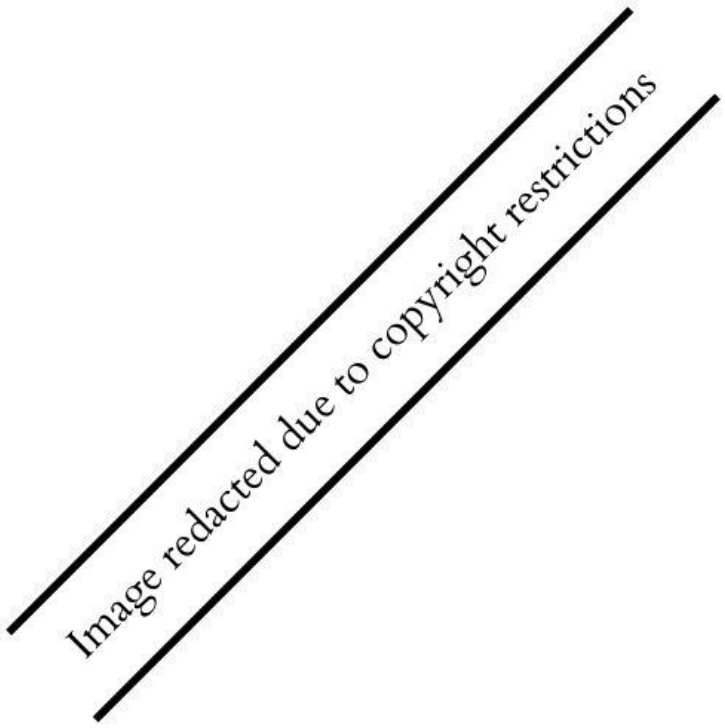

Figure 10. Virginia Stephen, sketch 1 in the manuscript M32—VOL 2, Berg Collection, NYPL.

The first drawing is a mere sketch, in which the only clearly discernible object is a face. Nonetheless, the sketch is notably animate, even action-packed. The numerous lines, some of them straight, others veering, suggest a jumble of movement. Although DeSalvo proposes that both of these drawings illustrate Helen, and the monumentality, the cloak

[129] Smith, p.25; Dalsimer (2001), p.170.
[130] Dalsimer (2001), p.170; DeSalvo, p.9.
[131] NYPL, Berg Collection, MS of *The Voyage Out*, M32—VOL 2.

reminiscent of chapter 1, and the done-up hair make the identity of the second one fairly certain, the face in the first sketch might just as well be Rachel's. Helen, however, is the source of the action in the tumble scene. The page next to the sketch contains the beginning of the scene in this holograph's version: Helen moving 'through the long grass at a considerable pace', 'br[eaking] into a run, uttering Rachels name in breathless ~~gasps~~ shouts', 'swe[eping] past [Terence], cantering' and all the while 'abusing [Rachel] roundly'.[132] The sketch reproduces some of the disarray and vigour of the written scene.

The second drawing, too, echoes elements of the scene it accompanies. As Dalsimer also notes, the drawing is 'upside down, and it takes up an entire page'[133]:

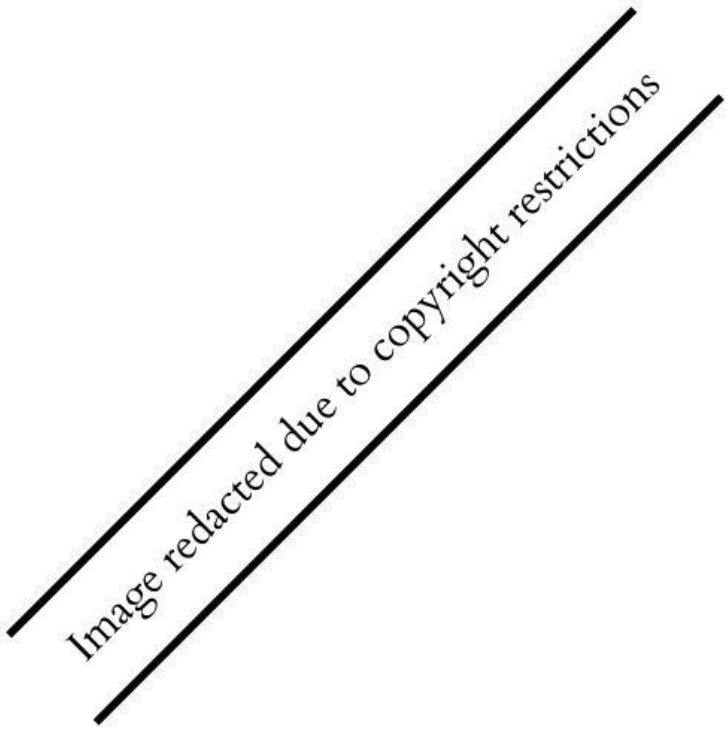

Figure 11. Virginia Stephen, sketch 2 in the manuscript M32—VOL 2, Berg Collection, NYPL.

This monumental, Madonna-like woman, as already stated, is a recognisable Helen, with her upright posture and cloak wrapped around herself, emphasising her privacy. The hands look active. The roundness of the figure calls to mind the matryoshka doll, which further suggests something hidden at her core. The smudging around her eyes, mouth and hair suggest that the drawer wanted to especially highlight these features of feminine beauty. The hugeness of this woman is all the more highlighted in juxtaposition to Virginia's minute handwriting on the page next to the drawing; upside down, the woman hovers above this version of the tumble, rather like Helen comes to dominate the airspace in the scene:

[132] NYPL, Berg, M32—VOL 2.
[133] Dalsimer (2001), p.170.

'Rachel saw Helen's head pendent over her, very large against the sky.'[134] There is something uncanny about this female figure's hint of a smile, statuesque form and dark lifeless stare, which is not only due to the skill of the sketcher.

This manuscript includes a description of Terence 'hear[ing] them panting, gasping more like retriever puppies than grown women', which provides a fascinating example of Virginia thinking about the playful, reckless and erotic aspects of her sister relationship through canine imagery, about 20 years before *Flush*, which I will scrutinise in Chapter 4.[135] The passage also sheds some light onto the notable change of Terence and Helen's chummy handshake becoming a kiss: here, 'For the next ~~two~~ few seconds they [Rachel, Helen, and Terence] rolled indiscriminately together, imparting hands full of grass together with attempted kisses.'[136] It appears, then, that Rachel was literally cut out from what at some point was a three-way kiss—this seclusion once again reproducing Virginia's position in relation to the Bells and working to emphasise Rachel's isolation even when the marriage plot seems to reach her.

SEX AND MURDEROUSNESS

To return to Smith and Dalsimer's arguments about lesbian rape, it is interesting that Smith is looking at the passage in *The Voyage Out* to make her claim, and Dalsimer at a holograph much akin to *Melymbrosia*—and whilst both find the text a representation of lesbian rape, Smith also argues the passage in *Melymbrosia*, is 'considerably less violent'.[137] She points out that 'the threat of physical restriction and punishment is certainly subdued in comparison to that which appears in subsequent revisions and can be deemed playful—but it is also mutual.'[138] This is a thought-provoking claim of a scene with an explicit description of strangling—and it points to the ambiguity of sex and violence that frames the many versions of this scene.

Melymbrosia may be more outspoken about sororal desire, and yet *The Voyage Out* contains an almost explicit account of a woman's orgasm, as she 'realises' another's 'soft body'; and it may be less threatening, and yet it depicts Helen's 'hand upon Rachel's throat', 'knocking her down when she tried to get up' and 'stuffing grass into her mouth'. The tumble scene*s* – to acknowledge their numerousness – stage simultaneous feelings of love

[134] NYPL, Berg, M32—VOL 2.
[135] NYPL, Berg, M32—VOL 2.
[136] NYPL, Berg, M32—VOL 2.
[137] Smith, p.29.
[138] Smith, p.29.

and hate for the same person that appear in a variety of guises but revert to the same primary ambiguity. In her explanation of the difference between Oedipal drives and sibling-oriented desires, Mitchell emphasises the separateness of the two Oedipal events (killing the father; having sex with mother) and clarifying that with siblings, 'both acts and emotions of sex and of murderousness are *for the same person*.'[139] It is such a conglomeration of 'acts and emotions of sex and of murderousness [...] *for the same person*' that is displayed in Helen and Rachel's tussle. Such conflicting feelings in sibling relations, according to Mitchell, are 'primary' and thus fundamentally influential of how we learn to treat our other lateral equals, or siblings' 'successors, peers and affines'.[140]

Virginia, too, recalled such a primary scene of sibling violence as one of her important formative moments. In 'Sketch of the Past', she juxtaposes the 'cotton wool' of daily life with occasions of 'a sudden violent shock', when 'something happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life.'[141] The very first of these memories, emphasising how deeply affective it was, is her recollection of 'fighting with Thoby on the lawn.'[142] This is a memory of actual sibling violence and a shocking realisation of their existence as 'another person': 'Just as I raised my fist to him, I felt: why hurt another person?' But Thoby continues to beat her, and she becomes 'aware of something terrible' and utterly isolated: 'I slunk off alone, feeling horribly depressed.'I venture that Virginia is becoming aware of the willingness to hurt even those most like ourselves, or at the very least, our ability to commit acts of violence toward one another, which, like in this memory, is often first realised in sibling relations. Butler likewise reminds us of violence and battling at the foundation of siblingship, when she points to the civil-war fought between Polyneices and Eteocles, leading up to the events of *Antigone*: they are 'acting, we might say, as brothers do.'[143] Perhaps 'siblings' would be a more appropriate term here, and it is also necessary to keep in mind Antigone's excessive commitment to her brother's uniqueness; in any case, turning back to the tumble scenes in *The Voyage Out* and *Melymbrosia*, with their intermingled and inseparable incestuous eroticism and sororal murderousness, we witness Virginia's take on sisters acting as sisters do.

DEATH AND MARRIAGE

[139] Mitchell, p.35.
[140] Mitchell, p.48, 33.
[141] 'Sketch of the Past', p.84.
[142] 'Sketch of the Past', p.84.
[143] Butler (2000), p.62.

The violent desires explored in *The Voyage Out* have a violent end. The manifest desire and rage of the tumble scenes frame the final chapters, as Rachel falls ill and dies—a fate which the novel has regularly foreshadowed and offered as an alternative to assumptions of the marriage plot. Rachel's death leaves those closest to her, Helen and Terence, bereft and absent from the final two chapters, which in some ways suggest the relentless inevitability that life will continue in spite of personal tragedies, but also underlines the privacy of grief. Omitting Helen and Terence from the last chapters leaves them suspended with the dying Rachel and the desirous and rageful scenes shared with her; this narrative decision colours these characters' relationship with unprocessed loss, and reminds us of the grief which is a permanent element of kinship in the world of Virginia's first novel.

The narrative reporting of Rachel's final moments is purposefully patchy. As in a number of important previous scenes, the narrative is delivered from Terence's point-of-view, which leaves Helen and Rachel at a distance and emphasises Terence's experience of alienation from the two women during Rachel's illness. He remains mostly in the dark about Rachel's condition, and since Helen has mostly become silent and full of 'extraordinary and mournful beauty', any attempt to understand the women's relationship at this point mostly relies on Rachel's hallucinations (V409). As Molly Hite observes, Helen, along with the nurse, becomes part of Rachel's visions of female violence which emphasise older women's betrayal of 'her into the social world where she is pursued and tormented.'[144] Helen is warped and distorted in these apparitions, which echo Rachel's position and visions during the tumble: here too, 'Helen's form stooping to raise her in bed appeared of gigantic size, and came down upon her like the ceiling falling' (V404). This suggests that Rachel's illness and hallucinations may be resulting from the same explosive conflicts that manifested in the tumble. Furthermore, Rachel's vision of drowning in 'the dark, sticky pool' is not only related to the maternal. (V404)[145] It is also a repetition of her experience of drowning or being strangled by Helen in the jungle. These images, along with my earlier analysis of Helen as a failing maternal figure, promote an impression of Helen being responsible for Rachel's fate to a great extent.

Rachel's death is a culmination of the processing and manipulation of significant disruptions in the author's sibling relations. Stella's death had already suggested an association between marriage, illness and untimely death, and the consecutive losses of Thoby – to disease, chance, and typhoid fever – and Vanessa – to the seemingly inevitable

[144] Molly Hite, 'The Public Woman and the Modernist Turn: Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and Elizabeth Robins's *My Little Sister*', *Modernism/modernity*, 3 (2010), p.540.
[145] For example Hite reads it as maternal, p.540.

heteropatriarchal marriage plot – brought the two, death and marriage, into an even more intimate connection in Virginia's mind. *The Voyage Out* merges these events in the fate of an autobiographical protagonist that has touches of a fantasy of revenge or martyrdom, but, like *Antigone*, it also painfully explores what kinship might consist of after violent, conclusive losses of lateral kin. Helen and Rachel's relationship underscores the urgent importance of affinity and intimacy as well as the fundamental inadequacy of the kinship models available to women. In a world which Virginia can control, death seems the only alternative to marriage, and since death can hardly be a 'viable' alternative, there are really no options at all. But in addition to criticising marriage as an institution and a fixed narrative, Rachel's death also disrupts the homosocial possibility, because that, too, appeared impossible to Virginia, disappointed in the sororal alternative she had imagined.

What, then, can break the bond of kinship? In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's kinship bonds are disrupted by death. Rachel's death is a manifestation of the fact that there are no viable alternatives to the patriarchal heterosexual marriage plot, and, symptomatically, Rachel dies after her search for affinity and lateral parity inevitably fails. In addition to breaching her existing, inadequate kinship bonds, her death renders finding any alternatives in organising social and familial life impossible, and as such is a rather extreme variation on the marriage plot. I have proposed a way to make sense of such excessiveness by regarding the novel's instances of violence as pointing to the extreme drives that underlie siblingships. Virginia's authorial decision to have her young female protagonist die before she marries and the violent aversion to marriage that the plot-twist signals are denotive of her extreme attachment to her married sister and the dead brother associated with that marriage. The related grief had momentarily breached Virginia's sororal bond with Vanessa. These painful emotions were shaded with the bipartite sexual and violent sibling impulse, and the forms they take in *The Voyage Out* demonstrate how elemental grief and loss became in this sister relationship. Here, the sororal bond appears perhaps in its most extreme shape, as a result of a rupture that twinned death with marriage in the work of an excessively hopeful and disappointed sister.

This chapter has explored the ways in which these sororal feelings of eroticism and violence were performed in the fictional space that Virginia's first novel provided. Considering *Antigone*'s role in theoretical reconfigurations of kinship, I have proposed that *The Voyage Out* and *Melymbrosia*, intertexts to the play of siblings as well as to each other, are most productively read 'slantwise' with a focus on lateral kin relations. By analysing the realisation of Virginia's sororal feelings of pain, love and hate in the novel(s), I have provided an example of a literary enactment of sisterly 'acts and emotions of sex and of

murderousness [...] *for the same person*'. [146] Indeed, neither Mitchell nor Butler provides an example that is as genuinely simultaneous in its conflicting emotionality towards '*the same person*', as Virginia's enactment of kinship in the tumble scene. This chapter has placed violence and ruptures at the heart of the sister relationship, and as we will see, this rupture in their herstory defined the relationship and its representations for years to come.

[146] Mitchell, p.35.

CHAPTER 3. *NIGHT AND DAY*: A PORTRAIT OF THE SISTER AS A YOUNG WOMAN

This chapter reads Katharine Hilbery of *Night and Day* (1919) as a portrait of Vanessa. Throughout, I have been suggesting that Virginia's fictional writing about Vanessa ought to be considered a tangible aspect of their relationship, and this position parallels understandings of life-writing as a site not only for the expression of the self but also its performance and creation.[1] As we have seen, from the beginning of her career, Virginia was interested in writing women's lives, the relationship between the biographer and her subject, and as Laura Marcus indicates, of the contention that successful biography would create and express life.[2] The focus of this chapter, rather than on the autobiographical self, is on the expression and creation of a fictionalised (auto)biographical other; I am interested in *Night and Day*'s reflections on the question as to how one portrays, and how one should portray, a sister. In particular, how does Virginia arrive at the conclusions implied in her novel's dedication to Vanessa—'LOOKING FOR A PHRASE,/I FOUND NONE TO STAND/BESIDE YOUR NAME'? The ethical questions implied in the processes of imagining portraits are especially urgent for authors and subjects of relational memoirs – fictionalised or not – which 'voyag[e] round one or more parent, a sibling, or friend.'[3] I propose a way of reading Katharine as a fundamentally sisterly and feminist project that undermines patriarchal dichotomies and examines the generative blurring of boundaries between person and character, fact and fiction, life and art. The portrait significantly engages with the sisters' narrativisation of their by-now-familiar herstory – the tentative carving out of sororal space and alternative kinship arrangements in the domestic and social spaces of a patriarchal world – and ushers the writerly sister relationship towards a new kind of openness.

Among Virginia's novels, *Night and Day* is the most explicit attempt to renegotiate and reform traditional marriage and courtship plots—in comparison to *The Voyage Out*, one may even call it hopeful.[4] It is also the most extensive and explicit portrait of Vanessa.

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[1] Max Saunders, *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.511.

[2] Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical discourses: Theory, criticism, practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.100. Marcus proposes this on the basis of Virginia's 1909 short-story 'Memoirs of a Novelist'.

[3] Saunders, p.6.

[4] Recent criticism has paid increasing attention to the novel's unconventional, even radical treatment of aspects of heteronormative marriage. For example, Clara Jones argues that *Night and Day* asks 'questions about the nature of modern marriage', and reading the novel intertextually alongside Stopes' marriage-manual *Married Love* (1918), suggests that 'Woolf's attitude towards this institution and its efficacy in a modern world looks decidedly uneasy' ('*Married Love* and War in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', unpublished conference

While Virginia was working on it, she declared to her sister several times that 'I've been writing about you'.[5] After the novel's publication, she tried to instruct her friends on how to read it, recommending Janet Case to 'try thinking of Katharine as Vaessa, not me'.[6] I believe that these explicit aims of the novel – thinking about alternatives for traditional heteropatriarchal kinship formation and portraying her sister – are closely related.

Considering the question 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', Butler emphasises the importance of non-heterosexual ties for revolutionary figurations of kinship. Traditional marriage is a safe site for the reproduction not only of children but also of culture: Butler observes that '[v]ariations on kinship that depart from normative, dyadic heterosexually based family forms secured through the marriage vow are figured not only as dangerous for the child, but perilous to the putative natural and cultural laws said to sustain human intelligibility.'[7] Since culture reproduces and naturalises heterosexuality and its institution, marriage, Butler asks how can we 'break out of this circle whereby heterosexuality institutes monolithic culture and monolithic culture reinstitutes and renaturalizes heterosexuality?'[8] The question suggests the difficulties involved in imagining any alternatives to heterosexual marriage, which delimit and obscure the alternatives *Night and Day* is able to visualise. The overall plot, with the double engagement at the novel's denouement, does of course end up reproducing heterosexuality and marriage, which reveals the extent of the difficulty in imagining viable alternatives, but throughout the novel these alternatives are longed for and imagined. As I will demonstrate, *Night and Day* finds potential for these alternatives in ideas of equity and sameness, which are primarily embodied in the portrayal of Vanessa as Katharine Hilbery, whose private visionary world and lateral relationships query meanings of kinship and hint at some of its possible refigurations.

THE WISE VIRGINS

Mark Hussey has put forward the grounds for reading *Night and Day* as an exploration of the terms of conventional marriage, identifying the novel as a part of a dialogue or a cluster

paper given at *Virginia Woolf, Europe and Peace: The 28th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, 24 June 2018, University of Kent).

[5] *Letters*, II, p.232.
[6] *Letters*, II, p.400.
[7] Butler (2002), p.16.
[8] Butler (2002), p.35.

of books by Virginia and Leonard Woolf.[9] *Night and Day*, in particular, is clearly a response to, and an extension of, Leonard's *Wise Virgins*, published in 1913, but which Virginia read for the first time in 1915. *The Wise Virgins* is a *roman à clef*, arising from Leonard's frustrations with his courtship of Virginia: following the story of Harry Davis, it speculates what would have happened to its author, if the cold, aloof, but brilliant and enigmatic Camilla Lawrence – or Virginia Stephen – had not accepted his proposal. Given the autobiographical character of the book, it naturally includes Virginia's equally beautiful and fascinating sister, and the Lawrence sisters evidently influenced her portrayal of Vanessa in *Night and Day*.

As a *roman à clef*, *The Wise Virgins*' relationship to lived life – or 'fact' – may appear deceptively simple, but 'of course', as Max Saunders writes, 'novelists change more than just the names', which encourages us to consider the blurring of life-writing and fiction in both Leonard's novel and *Night and Day*.[10] The fictionality of *The Wise Virgins* was apparently sufficient to enable Leonard to narrate his experience of the courting in ways he would not otherwise have indulged; and yet its correspondence to life made him wary of allowing his new wife to read it during her illness. Evidently, however stereotyped and dramatised the *roman* was, it intervened with life tangibly, as some of the reader reactions discussed below show. As the departure-point for Katharine, *The Wise Virgins* emphasises both the (auto)biographical and the invented elements of *Night and Day*, and their interactions in constituting and creating family narratives and the relationship between the author and his/her subjects.

In characterising the Lawrence sisters, *The Wise Virgins* scrupulously depends on stereotypical dichotomies, and so produces and reiterates patriarchal and essentialist depictions of the Stephen sisters. Camilla's elder sister Katharine Lawrence embodies many aspects of the myth around Vanessa's character. *The Wise Virgins* repeatedly both blurs the identities of the sisters and sets them apart as each other's opposites. The men of their circle are not always quite clear about which sister they are in love with, and the sisters and their fates are defined by their sexual availability to Harry and the other men: Katharine is associated with sexuality and motherhood and thus '[h]er face was already like that of a mother's', whereas Camilla's 'would always retain something of the virgin's.'[11] Katharine

[9] Mark Hussey, 'Refractions of Desire: The Early Fiction of Virginia and Leonard Woolf', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 1 (1992), p.127.
[10] Saunders, p.8.
[11] Leonard Woolf, *The Wise Virgins* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p.82. Further references will appear in the body text.

Lawrence has a natural preference for men, and rather like the conventional William Rodney thinks of Katharine Hilbery, it is easy to imagine her as "a mother of sons".[12]

Katharine Lawrence is depicted as the embodiment of desirable womanhood and an allegorical figure of semi-divine wisdom. Looking at her is pleasurable to the young man: 'It soothed him even to look at her. She was so calm and beautiful and wise, like some figure of spacious Justice sitting on the world and judging it [...] to be good.' (101) Harry's male gaze finds Katharine an easy object to sexualise: 'The softness of her as a woman attracted him physically, the soft lines of her woman's body, the softness of her lips and skin and hair, the softness of the curves and folds of her dress' (102). Katharine's effect is simultaneously awe-inspiring and sexually arousing: she 'seemed like a symbol of all that is physically desired in woman' (102). Her influence on him is drug-like: she 'was enfolding him in her large and tolerant sagacity, soothing him with her unastonished wisdom' (105). Katharine is not only accessible to Harry; he is also profoundly impressed with the vastness of the feminine presence that is provided for his comfort. The wonderful thing about Katharine is that she yields to the man without resistance, because she is a natural bedfellow to him: a mother and/or wife—everything that her sister Camilla, the frigid virgin, is not.

In the eyes of the present-day reader, the apparent misogyny of *The Wise Virgins* is accompanied by the fantasy of the eternal feminine in the character of Katharine Lawrence. This view of Vanessa was, however, widespread in the Bloomsbury Group, and it was maintained, circulated, and added to by many of the men who were attracted to her. Leonard describes Vanessa's goddess-like 'physical splendour' in his autobiography, recalling her 'most beautiful speaking voice' and 'her tranquillity and quietude'.[13] Roger Fry's letters to his beloved Vanessa imagine a soothing maternal effect not unlike that of Katharine Lawrence:

> I think of how beautifully you'll be walking about the rooms and how you'll take Quentin onto your knee and how patient you are and yet how you are just being yourself all the time and not making any huge effort just living very intensely and naturally and how perfectly reasonable you are[14]

[12] Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*, ed. by Michael Whitworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.258. Further references will appear in the body text.
[13] Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911—1918* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p.27.
[14] Quoted in Isabelle Anscombe, *Omega and After: Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), p.54.

While these accounts, and their popularity among those who knew Vanessa, suggest that they were based on something decipherable in her character, they omit the efforts she must have made to accommodate the variety of wishes and requirements imposed on her. These representations of Vanessa as a natural source of swathes of love had their consequences for her relationships; for example, it took a long time for Roger to accept that Vanessa no longer had love to give him, making her write to him 'I wonder how wrong you were about me!', and, as Isabelle Anscombe paraphrases, 'explaining that perhaps he expected something of her that had simply never been there—not something that she was coldly refusing him.'[15] The emphasis on Vanessa's naturalness is interesting in light of Saunders' proposition that autobiographical subjectivities should be read according to a 'Butlerian version of performativity as bringing into being the very subject it purports to express': it appears that the identities we impose on others, like those we impose on ourselves, also come to seem natural due to repetition.[16]

Such portrayals of Vanessa as a blooming semi-divine Woman easily become fixed, simplified and reductive in auto/biographical and fictionalised depictions such as *The Wise Virgins*. As a caricature, *The Wise Virgins*' portrayal of Vanessa is presumably exaggerated purposefully. Yet even in a lot of contemporary criticism, this view of her is accepted to the extent that Julia Briggs, assessing Leonard's novel as a predecessor to *Night and Day*, could claim that, out of the author's near-circle, Vanessa was the only one whose character 'emerges unscathed' from the novel that presented her as the perfect woman in the eyes of the deeply misogynist Harry Davis.[17]

A FROGS' CHORUS

Virginia's use of such myths of Vanessa's divine femininity is complex. On one hand, when drawing from such essentialist models, her portraits risked being confined (and confining); on the other, the sexualised figures may be said to have liberated her to express sororal erotic attraction and other feelings that lacked a rhetorical tradition.[18] Moreover, by taking on the role of the progenitor of Vanessa mythology and joining the company of men attracted to her sister, she could influence and criticise the language. In her letters to Vanessa, Virginia usually gendered herself (or her animal alter egos) masculine and enjoyed

[15] *Selected Letters*, p.222; Anscombe, p.100.
[16] Saunders, p.513.
[17] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (London: Penguin, 2006), p.31.
[18] Unsurprisingly, considering the traditional silencing of lesbian attraction, also the bisexual Ottoline Morrell joined in: she praised Vanessa to Virginia: "[t]hat exquisite head, on that lovely body—a Demeter" (*Letters*, II, p.156).

reproducing the conversations she took part in singing her sister's praises: 'Roger and I had a frogs chorus [...] "Yes she's the most remarkable human being I've ever known in my life" was the theme of it.'[19]

Virginia joked to Vanessa that it was 'loathsome' to hear her praised, but she also wanted to be recognised as the authority on Vanessa. In a letter written in November 1917, Virginia features as the one of Vanessa's devotees who says the 'truest thing' about her:

> The following conversation took place a few nights ago at Rogers:
> R. "Vanessa really gets more and more amazing—I mean her character.
> Clive: Yes. She's quite sublime.
> V.W: Her natural piety has greatly increased.
> R: And then her painting.
> [...]
> Clive: But you know its her character!
> Roger: The greatness!
> Clive: The originality!
> V.W: We've talked enough about Nessa—
> In fact there was much more in this loathsome strain, which I cant bring myself to write down. I said the truest thing though—about natural piety—[20]

Vanessa's character – and it is her character, rather than painting, on which the admirers concentrate – appears both to defy and invite description. The abstract nouns such as 'greatness' or sublimity, exalted with exclamation points, simultaneously depict nothing very specific and hail something immeasurable. Virginia's phrase in particular, 'natural piety', links Vanessa with devotional imagery and emphasises the supposed naturalness or effortlessness of her godliness. Simultaneously however, her phrase, meaningless as it is, makes fun of the very iconography. Virginia, also, pictured Vanessa's sublimity as assuredly feminine: she hoped that Vanessa's third child would be a girl; 'its the possibilities of womanhood derived from you that I dream of.'[21] Virginia's representation of her sister as a sublime, feminine mystery was evidently amongst its kind in the imagination of their

[19] *Letters*, II, p.300.
[20] *Letters*, II, p.197.
[21] *Letters*, II, p.299.

charmed friends: she was, to borrow her image, one of the 'Toad[s] who ha[ve] heard the nightingale's song.'[22]

My contention that Katharine should be considered as one of the eroticised products of the charmed frogs' chorus stands in stark contrast with the common claim that *Night and Day* refuses to depict sexuality. Garnett thought *Night and Day* 'true to [Virginia's] own conception, both of the novel, and of her sister's character', but found it lacking because in it her aunt 'did not succeed, or even try, to suggest Vanessa's sexuality, or her naturally sensuous nature'.[23] This is a self-contradictory claim to make, since sexuality and sensuality were very much a part of Virginia's conception of her sister's character. Moreover, whilst Katharine does not seem to experience much sexual attraction to either Rodney or Denham, her fiancés, there are scenes – discussed later – in which she is very sensuously aware of women's bodies, as Hussey demonstrates in 'Refractions of Desire'. In addition, the depictions that do portray Vanessa in heterosexual terms – the Bloomsbury myths about her or Katharine Lawrence, for example – fail to represent her sexuality: seeing her as a sex object is not a portrayal of *her* sexuality. Given Virginia's feeling for Vanessa – she 'admit[s]' her vision of 'Dolphin sitting on a terrace in a flowered muslin', 'the white legs of prostitutes', and 'oh the butterflies [...]make my mouth water'[24] – it is understandable that she would imagine a Vanessa with homosocial, or even homosexual, romantic tendencies.

In fact, Katharine represents in many ways an opportunity for Virginia to play around with her sister's sexuality. Part of this game – which foreshadows *Orlando* (1928) – is gendering Katharine masculine: one of the reasons she works on mathematics in secret is its perceived 'unwomanly nature' (40). Rodney especially finds Katharine's careless attitude 'masculine' and therefore disturbing (300), but also the narrator characterises the protagonist as masculine when she is compared with her cousin Cassandra Otway: 'they represented very well the manly and the womanly sides of the feminine nature' (362). This resembles an early version of Virginia's theory of the androgynous mind in *A Room of One's Own*, and is all the more fascinating because, although thus opposed, the cousins are united by the 'foundation' of their connection: 'the profound unity of common blood between them' (362). Sharing blood 'for foundation' suggests Virginia's tendency to comprehend 'feminine nature' within a framework of family relations and to organise her thinking through binaries such as 'manly and womanly', which, as we see here, become undermined due to

[22] *Letters*, II, p.216.
[23] Angelica Garnett, 'Introduction' to Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.xxiii, xviii.
[24] *Letters*, II, p.486.

their shared basis: the women's kinship undercuts and overrides the dichotomous characterisation of Katharine and Cassandra representing opposing poles.

The blurring of Katharine's gender identity is also suggested by the allusions to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, which, as Jane DeGay writes, 'undermine the imperatives of gender, courtship and marriage.'[25] Katharine is repeatedly compared to the comedy's cross-dressed heroine, and her identification with Rosalind complicates and confuses her affinity with both Ralph and Mary Datchet, who, in an added layer of gender-play, is also sometimes described as masculine.[26] Furthermore, considering Katharine's supposed masculinity and her relationship with her cousin in relation to the Rosalind allusions may create unexpected connections between *As you Like It* and *Night and Day*; despite their conventional endings in marriage, there are nudges towards other featured forms of kinship, such as 'the profound unity of common blood', or Celia's love for her cousin Rosalind, 'dearer than the natural bond of sisters.'[27] Overall, in cases like Katharine Lawrence, or Rodney's superficial view of Katharine Hilbery, the heterosexuality (of the man) overdefines the woman; omitting, complicating and undermining it enable a deeper exploration of Katharine's, or Vanessa's, character, imagining a woman on her own, free from the definitions imposed on her by her relations with men.

Perhaps, then, neither fact is surprising—that Virginia found Katharine Lawrence so suggestive of Vanessa that she named the central character of *Night and Day* after her, nor that she deliberately complicated her. As Briggs points out, before reading *The Wise Virgins*, Virginia had been writing a story about a woman called 'Effie', whom she now renamed 'Katharine', keeping the less usual Greek spelling of the name as it appeared in Leonard's novel.[28] However, the straightforward affinity between the characters of *Night and Day* and *The Wise Virgins* ends here, because Katharine Hilbery, accused by her lovers for being cold and unyielding, is not very much like Katharine Lawrence—rather, she takes after Camilla. The implications and complications of the muddled correspondence have not been considered by Briggs or others who have connected the dots between the two Katharines. Hussey acknowledges the similarities between Camilla and Katharine Hilbery but leaves

[25] Jane DeGay, *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.59.
[26] See the beginning of chapter 4. A further instance of Shakespearian roleplay in Virginia's work is naming her character based on Vita 'Orlando'—the man who falls in love with the cross-dressed Rosalind.
[27] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions), pp.611—640, I.ii.238.
[28] Briggs, p.31, p.411n57. Briggs also notes that Woolf would later use 'Camilla' for herself as a child in *To the Lighthouse*, which demonstrates a certain degree of acceptance of the Lawrences as portraits of herself and Vanessa (pp.31—32).

'the confusion' of the two Katharines unscrutinised and consigned to a footnote.[29] I suggest, instead, that the continuum and development of the Katharines is fundamental to Virginia's portrayal of Vanessa in *Night and Day*, which repeats aspects of the patriarchal stereotyping and dichotomising witnessed in *The Wise Virgins* but also resists them through blurring and repetition.

THE KATHARINE CONTINUUM

By using 'continuum' I wish to invoke Mitchell's seriality and Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum and place Katharine within these sequences. Katharine Hilbery in fact suits Rich's description of 'marriage resisters' in 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence': these women were 'committed to their own work and selfhood, and were later characterized as "apolitical"' and they were 'drawn to men of intellectual quality' for whom they 'provided the on-going fascination and sustenance of life.'[30] In Katharine's life, too, compulsory heterosexuality leads to a "double-life" and the invisibility of women's relationships.[31] Rich's argument that all women exist on a lesbian continuum is useful in terms of reassessing Katharine's personal relationships, but particularly the image of the continuum – 'a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, but the extremes are quite distinct'[32] – allows us to imagine a number of Katharines: the Lawrence sisters may be found in the continuum, as may Rodney's – or Denham's, or Mary's – idea of Katharine, and Rodney's Katharine would appear very different from Katharine's own idea of herself, though they might both share some features with, for example, Mrs Hilbery's perceptions of her. The image conjures up a multitude of non-restrictive portraits and identities, and may also be useful in thinking about sisters and their varying degrees of sameness and difference.

Merging the two sisters, Camilla and Katharine Lawrence – or Virginia and Vanessa Stephen – into the character Katharine Hilbery is a complication of the *Wise Virgin* portraits: it forms a rounder character and produces a new perspective on the dreamy, idolised Katharine. As the fact that Virginia had to direct her readers to think of Katharine as Vanessa and not herself suggests, her protagonist is in many ways recognisably autobiographical, not least because she ends up engaged to Ralph Denham, whose characteristics overlap with those of Harry Davis and Leonard. As she had done in

[29] Hussey, p.130n7.
[30] Rich, p.652.
[31] Rich, p.659.
[32] 'continuum', *Lexico*, 2020, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/continuum> [accessed 6.3.2020].

'Reminiscences', Virginia once more uses Vanessa, or the character based on her, as a placeholder to write about her own experiences.

Significantly, Virginia's treatment of Katharine draws attention to the character's constructedness. In combining Katharine and Camilla Lawrence into one version of Katharine Hilbery, we can detect the author acting upon her subject. This kind of dynamic relationship foreshadows some of the insights she would later reach in 'The New Biography', in which she links the new biographer's acts of selection, synthesising and shaping to those of an artist or novelist, and imagines this new 'author's relation to his subject' as more vigorous and complex than those of the biographers of old.[33] In *Night and Day*, Virginia actively chooses to work on versions of Vanessa, and her blurring of the characters Leonard based on her and her sister is deliberate. In chapter 5, Rodney and Denham discuss the enigma of Katharine Hilbery; Rodney declares that "[s]he can understand you when you talk to her" (68). He also professes that "I should never think of telling Katharine the truth about herself" (68). This conversation refers to a scene in *The Wise Virgins*, in which Harry and another man, Trevor, discuss the Lawrence sisters—Harry believes that they are talking about Camilla, and Trevor thinks their topic is Katharine.[34] In Katharine Hilbery, the blurred identities of the Lawrence sisters merge into one; at least in Rodney's figuration of her, she is indeed a character capable of super-womanly understanding as well as unable to understand the truth about herself—which, it appears, only a man like Rodney knows.

Virginia accepted Camilla and Katharine Lawrence as portraits of herself and her sister to an extent, but she probably also felt some of Vanessa's indifferent amusement towards the *Wise Virgins*. Vanessa seems to have been one of the few who did not find Leonard's caricatures worth getting upset over. Amongst the upset was their brother Adrian:[35]

> Adrian was here last night and amused us very much about Woolf's novel. He is furious about it and will find it difficult to meet Woolf in consequence! I hadn't really thought that the description of him was meant to be so uncomplimentary—it was so obviously superficial—but he had been made angry enough to send in Woolf a bill

[33] 'The New Biography', p.97; see also Laura Marcus, p.92.
[34] Virginia deliberately echoes lines from the scene, such as "Katharine's the only woman I've ever met who understands the bare truth" or the "only woman I know to whom you can say anything or everything", and "Camilla? Well, there are some things which one probably could not say to her." "What things?" "About herself." (50—51).
[35] Adrian is portrayed as the Lawrence sisters' father, whom 'most people, including his children', treat 'as a contemporary' (45).

> for £70! [...] he certainly will publish it, so there may be a fine family row soon! And even if it's not published, relations will be strained, according to Adrian![36]

This paragraph from Vanessa's letter to Duncan evidences her mirth at the family-scale scandal the book was causing. She seems to have found the prospect of a 'fine family row' very entertaining—and pointless. Vanessa herself found *The Wise Virgins* 'so obviously superficial' that it was not to be taken seriously.

The Lawrence sisters are likewise so superficial that merging them only results in one of the many aspects of Katharine Hilbery—the view held by Rodney. For there is indeed a multitude of Katharines in *Night and Day*: her public self or selves that exist in the social world she is, involuntarily, implicated in, and her private self, a woman alone, who practices mathematics and daydreams. In her analysis of Katharine's dream-world, Ann-Marie Priest takes the division between the two worlds as her departure-point: Katharine 'straddles these worlds' – 'the everyday world of social life and interaction, and a shadowy other realm in which the everyday world simply ceases to exist' – and for her, 'the first is a place of constraint, the second of liberation'.[37] This separation of the worlds and selves calls to mind *Night and Day*'s working title: 'Dreams and Realities'. The phrase is lifted from Katharine Lawrence's rumination on her sister Camilla: 'I sometimes think there is no dividing line in Milla, between her dreams, I mean, and her realities.' (103) The Vanessa character's view on her sister thus becomes a part of Virginia's portrait of her sister as a young woman: there is an inevitable dividing line between Katharine Hilbery's dreams and realities, and that is why existing in the world of social realities is difficult for her. Virginia's Katharine, as a sisterly portrait, is inherently feminist: it brings together several identities and figurations of the sisters, and instead of only representing the woman as an idol or the object of men's dreams, it complicates and focuses the possible views of her, asking what the woman of men's dreams dreams about for herself.

A BLUE DRESS

Having looked at Katharine's origins, I now turn to her portrayal in *Night and Day*. Virginia's character engages variously with the novel's contemporary visual cultures—one of these is fashion, a field intimately associated with women. Virginia sustained a fascination

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[36] *Selected Letters*, p.154.
[37] Ann-Marie Priest, 'Between Being and Nothingness: The 'Astonishing Precipice' of Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 2 (2003), p.66.

with clothing throughout her life, and during the 1910s her fashion sense was both heightened and scandalised by Vanessa's experiments in dress-making. In 1915, Vanessa designed dresses for female friends such as Marjorie Strachey and Ottoline Morrell. She enjoyed the work greatly, exhibited some dresses at the Omega, and had further ideas, worked-out in co-operation with Mary Hutchinson, which unfortunately did not materialise. But, as Anscombe writes, 'not everyone liked Vanessa's dress designs or had the flair [...] to wear her choice of colour.'[38] Virginia was among those who found her sister's designs too bold: 'My God!', she wrote to her, after having seen their sister-in-law's new clothes, 'What colours you are responsible for! Karin's clothes almost wrenched my eyes from the sockets'.[39] Virginia's reaction was a typical exaggeration; in fact, she both had Vanessa design clothes for her and borrowed some of her clothes.[40]

Dresses get significant attention in *Night and Day* too: in many scenes Katharine's clothes are depicted making strong visual impressions, such as when Denham first meets her, wearing a 'dress of some quiet colour, with old yellow-tinted lace for ornament, to which the spark of an ancient jewel gave its one red gleam' (5). Clearly, Katharine's fashion aesthetic remains more like that of the young Stephen sisters or Virginia, who jokingly threatened to 'retire into [...] a lace collar, and lawn wristlets' after seeing Karen's dress.[41] However, although the male characters pay attention to Katharine's clothing – generally to (mis)judge her 'dressed too well to be eccentric' (218) – I find women's relationships with her dresses more meaningful. Writing about *The Years* (1937), Vike Plock proposes that at their best, 'clothes obtained significant political potential for unsettling established socio-sartorial hierarchies and for gesturing towards alternative modes of thinking not just about beauty but also about the formation of cooperative communities that are respectful of individual difference.'[42] Already *Night and Day* includes moments of such alternative formation of social connections; in particular women connect with one another through clothing. In two important scenes, clothes bring Katharine together first with Mary – I will discuss Mary's fingering of the fur on Katharine's dress later – and then with Cassandra in the blue dress scene I examine below—clearly rooting the delight Virginia took in well-dressed women in her early experiences of sororal connection.

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[38] Anscombe, p.62.
[39] *Letters*, II, p.111.
[40] *Letters*, II, p.92, 275. The exaggeration, besides highlighting the sisters' aesthetic differences, works to make Adrian's wife ridiculous—letters suggest that the sisters enjoyed mocking Karin's fashion sense, which even in Vanessa's opinion went too far: 'My word. Bright yellow, blue, red. You cant conceive it.' (NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 6 April 1919).
[41] *Letters*, II, p.111.
[42] Vike Plock, *Modernism, Fashion and Interwar Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p.198.

On 22 April 1918, Virginia wrote to Vanessa about her morning's work:

> I've been writing about you all the morning, and have made you wear a blue dress; you've got to be immensely mysterious and romantic, which of course you are; yes, but its the combination that's so enthralling; to crack through the paving stone and be enveloped in the mist. You must admit that that puts the matter in a nutshell.[43]

Katharine Hilbery wears a blue dress in chapter 26, which deals with her relationships with Cassandra, her adoring cousin, and Mary, whom Katharine is 'anxious to be with' (373). Cassandra helps her cousin get dressed, watching her admiringly. The vision of Katharine, and the language used to describe it, become elevated, producing the required mystery and romance of picturing the Vanessa character:

> Cassandra was impressed again by Katharine's maturity; and, as she enveloped herself in the blue dress which filled almost the whole of the long looking-glass with blue light and made it the frame of a picture, holding not only the slightly moving effigy of the beautiful woman, but shapes and colours of objects reflected from the background, Cassandra thought that no sight had ever been quite so romantic. (365)

In a way, the most intriguing word in this passage is 'herself': the ambiguous pronoun makes it sound like it is Cassandra, rather than Katharine, who is putting on the dress, but textual cues before and after this passage make it very clear that Katharine is wearing the blue dress. The sisterly identities are blurred. Overall, Cassandra is naïve, and her perception of Katharine's romance – which she, in an act of wide-eyed simplification, believes to be 'in keeping with the room and the house, and the city round them' (365) – should be read with a pinch of salt.

Nonetheless, the vision of Katharine is strikingly vivacious and picturesque. Virginia likens the mirror to a framed picture, giving an impression of spilling 'blue light' and a dramatic presence of the pictured woman—strongly reminiscent of both the traditional trope of painting women's portraits in conspicuous dresses and of the many portraits of imposing women Vanessa painted during the late 1910s, such as those of Iris Tree (1915), Mrs M (1919) or this one of herself:

[43] *Letters*, II, pp.232—233.

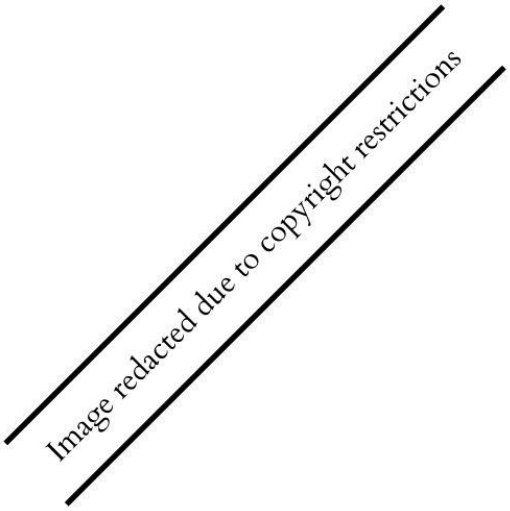

Figure 12. Vanessa Bell, *Self-Portrait* (1915).

The bulk of Vanessa's body appears sympathetic to the abstract background and her forward-pushing shoulder, with its visible seam, strongly communicates activity. Cassandra's vision of Katharine is likewise strongly aware of her surroundings, or the 'shapes and colours of objects reflected from the background' and how they exist in relation to one another, contributing to the totality of the picture. Beyond such general post-impressionist interest in 'shapes and colours', the vision also entertains 'movement, mass, weight', which in Vanessa's understanding were the 'qualities of life' that explained why 'artists paint life and not patterns'.[44] Katharine's act of enveloping herself in the blue dress as well as the phrase 'slightly moving effigy' – toying with the double meaning of the word 'moving' and the three-dimensional nature of effigies – emphasise movement in what Cassandra sees. Mass and weight are suggested by the verb 'holding': the blue dress not only fills the mirror, makes it a picture, it also holds the image of the woman and the background objects, suggesting that the pictured things have mass.

In Virginia's self-conscious assembling of a romantic portrait of Katharine, Cassandra's adoring gaze turns out to be a suitable vessel for both personal imaginings and impersonal ideas, because the two are, in the figure of Vanessa, related. The passage delights in the imaginative possibilities of the romance and mystery that its author's sister excites—part of the romance and mystery is expressed in the ambiguity of the pronouns, which make it possible to interpret that instead of describing Katharine, Cassandra is picturing herself posing as Katharine. Furthermore, the portrait suggests that Virginia was actively thinking about and incorporating not only post-impressionist concepts, but also her sister's

[44] Quoted in Spalding, p.126.

resistance to them, into her writing; she is simultaneously working at a portrait of her sister and developing her aesthetics.

Returning to Virginia's letter to Vanessa about her morning's work, we may note that it, too, reflects on Vanessa's portrayal and tries out imagery which would become central to Virginia's aesthetic sense. Virginia appears aware of the power she yields over her sister's character as Katharine: she has dressed her, or 'made you wear a blue dress', and, as the author, she sets the rules for her character: 'you've got to be immensely mysterious and romantic'.[45] Her flippant tone – 'which of course you are' – effortlessly cancels out any tendency to critically consider whether Vanessa indeed is 'immensely mysterious and romantic' or why she has to be so. Virginia identifies her sister's character as a combination of things, an amalgamation that inspires her 'to crack through the paving stone and be enveloped in the mist.' In *Night and Day*, paving stone and mist function as motifs in scenes that negotiate the distance between the worlds of realities and dreams and signal transformative moments for the characters.

Virginia senses that with the image of paving stone and mist she has landed on something significant, and she invites Vanessa to confirm the discovery: 'You must admit that that puts the matter in a nutshell.' [46] It seems to me that, like its contemporary dreams and realities, this juxtaposition of a concrete rocky substance and an evanescent weather phenomenon is a predecessor to her later granite and rainbow, the image for fact and fiction. In 'The New Biography', she considers 'the whole problem of biography as it presents itself to us today': 'On the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality.'[47] Others have tried to express the complexity of the relationship between Woolf's work and the 'two masters'—what is certain is that she saw imaginative truths and facts as 'antagonistic', and the former generally 'of a higher order'.[48] Evidently, she exploited this explosive antagonism – most extensively in *Orlando* – and I find persuasive Saunders' suggestion that she found the combinations of fact and fiction 'inadmissible in *biography*, but not in fiction'.[49] When it came to fictionalised portraiture, Virginia found her sister a source of inexhaustible inspiration—Vanessa was therefore akin to 'the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders', as elaborately manifested in *Night and Day*.[50] Her novel-length

[45] *Letters*, II, p.232.
[46] *Letters*, II, pp.232—233.
[47] 'The New Biography', p.95.
[48] 'The New Biography', p.100, 99; Laura Marcus, p.106. Interesting explorations of this antagonism include Claire Battershill, 'Life before "The New Biography": Modernist Biographical Methods in The Hogarth Press's "Books of Tolstoi," 1920—24', *Auto/biography Studies*, 1 (2016), and Elena Gualtieri, 'The Impossible Art: Virginia Woolf on Modern Biography', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 4 (2000).
[49] Saunders, p.467. Original emphasis.
[50] Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *Selected Essays*, pp.116—123 (123).

portrait of a sister stimulated the metaphors she would make central in her interrogation of fact and fiction, and in it, she also began to critically investigate the processes of being inspired by real people, imaginatively devising their personalities, and, as we will eventually see, realise fiction's liberating potential for facts.[51]

'HAVE I MADE YOU UP?'—'FOR PURPOSES OF MY OWN'

Yet, the mysterious mist surrounding Katharine has its problematic implications when we read her as a portrait. In his discussion of *Orlando* as a portrait of Vita Sackville-West, Saunders evokes Virginia asking Vita 'Have I made you up?'[52] As Saunders writes, '[t]o wonder if you have turned someone into fiction is to acknowledge the fantasmatic at the heart of your everyday relations.'[53] The implications of Virginia's question are intricate and tease out the two-way relationship between biographical and fictional making: if she had to 'make up' Vita, did Vita exist before she was made up? And if she did, was she like her portrait in *Orlando* before it was made up—or was she at all like her portrait? How far is *Orlando* a reflection of the fantasmatic, the constructed, or the performed at the heart of the women's relationship and Vita's identity, and how far does the fiction produce these supposedly non-fictional things?

These questions could also be asked about Katharine, although Virginia never reflected as explicitly critically on her made-up portraits of Vanessa, perhaps because their sororal propinquity implied that she could, and had the right to, make up her sister. Saunders goes on to identify the psychoanalytical terms '"identification", "love object", [and] 'transference'" as descriptors for the same phenomenon: 'the way in which the mind can swarm with shadow selves of our loved ones.'[54] Virginia's author's mind was certainly swarmed with such 'shadow selves', and the shadows of Vanessa – all Virginia's portraits of her – give the impression of a multitude of identities, as does Katharine, the most extensive of these portraits. Whilst the sheer number of these characterisations is part of the fiction's liberating potential, Saunders' metaphor suggests an important, ominous aspect of portraying these nebulous loved ones. Comparing biography and novels, Virginia stated

[51] Saunders argues that *Orlando* demonstrates that 'fiction's effect on fact is liberating rather than disabling' (p.467).
[52] *Letters*, III, p.474.
[53] Saunders, pp.479—80.
[54] Saunders, p.480.

that 'the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life': her commitment to the superiority of fiction over fact augments the ethical risks involved in representing others.[55]

Indeed these shadow selves often appear to dominate and impact Virginia's view of the real person, and this is a problem that Denham, who is in love with Katharine, shares with his creator. Writing Ralph's love, importantly, brought Virginia face to face with the process and issues of inventing and idealising a loved one's character. In the beginning of the novel, directly after Ralph and Katharine have met at the Hilberys', the narrator follows Ralph's changing ideas about their encounter. Upset with his failure to make an impression on the Hilberys, Ralph settles that "She'll do…. Yes, Katharine Hilbery'll do….I'll take Katharine Hilbery." (17) Immediately after this decision to possess Katharine, his mind and eyes 'bec[o]me fixed': 'his faculties leapt forward and fixed, as a matter of course, upon the form of Katharine Hilbery.' Ralph retrospectively submits to Katharine's 'charm' and 'the beauty, the character, the aloofness' 'now posse[ss] him wholly'. Having exhausted the facts he can recall, his fantasy continues to inflate with the help of his imagination:

> He was conscious of what he was about, for in thus dwelling upon Miss Hilbery's qualities, he showed a kind of method, as if he required this vision of her for a particular purpose. He increased her height, he darkened her hair; but physically there was not much to change in her. His most daring liberty was taken with her mind, which, for reasons of his own, he desired to be exalted and infallible, and of such independence that it was only in the case of Ralph Denham that it swerved from its high, swift flight (17—8)

Ralph's fantasies about Katharine resonate strongly with André Maurois' contention that "[b]iography is a means of expression when the author has chosen his subject in order to respond to a secret need in his own nature" and what Laura Marcus summarises as Freud's formulation of '[t]he dangers of the biographer's passionate or perverse identification'.[56] According to Freud, "infantile phantasies" "present us with what is in fact a cold, strange, ideal figure, instead of a human being to whom we might feel ourselves distantly related."[57] Ralph's method, indeed, involves changing some physical characteristics in the woman of his dreams, and his imagination also works on the quality of Katharine's mind, wishing her to be divine and superhuman, except when it comes to 'crown[ing

[55] 'The New Biography', p.100.
[56] Quoted in Laura Marcus, p.103; Laura Marcus p.103.
[57] Quoted in Laura Marcus, p.103.

himself] with her approval' (18). Ralph has 'a particular purpose' and 'reasons of his own' – 'a secret need in his own nature' – for making up this improved Katharine—it appears he needs a fantasy figure for his entertainment. Following these processes of Ralph imagining Katharine throughout *Night and Day* presses and exemplifies the fictionality in Katharine's – and by extension Vanessa's – characterisation.

Remarkably, these phrases echo Virginia's earlier pronouncement to her sister: 'I think a good deal about you, for purposes of my own'.[58] Lee reads this sentence as a summary of the sisters' professional relationship: 'All their lives the sisters were involved in a discussion about the relationship between their work, summed up by this sentence'.[59] Although the sentence does accurately describe their professional relationship, it is worth noting its familial context—Virginia's phrasing echoes her statement 'I'm thinking a good deal [...] about marriage' in the same letter. Virginia's purpose for thinking 'a great deal' about Vanessa has to do not only with the shaping of her aesthetics, but also with defining her own identity and difference from her sister, grounded in her imagining of Vanessa's character: she writes, 'You *are* a painter', and speculates on the implications of this identity, which is more than simply professional, as the italics emphasise. For Virginia, Vanessa's identity as a painter determines how she responds to 'the drone of daily life', what she presumably wants ('a studio'), and how her sister therefore differs from her own identity 'as a writer'. Confidently, Virginia states, 'This explains your simplicity', displaying her tendency to take pleasure in seeing Vanessa as simple. However, she does urge her sister to intervene in her portrait-making: 'If this is wrong, you might sent [sic] me a telegram.' The tone is humorous, but the following exclamation, 'God! I shall enjoy talking to you again', does suggest that in their conversations, Vanessa might have more readily negotiated the identities and assumptions Virginia imposed on her—this, however, did not reduce how amusing and enjoyable, rather like Denham, she found characterising her sister.

POSSESSIVE DREAMS

Throughout the novel Denham is haunted by the ghost of Katharine he conjures up; Virginia, too, found her dreamt-up vision of Vanessa intoxicating and possessive. In the letter cited above, where she writes to her sister that she has 'been writing about you all the morning', she continues: 'However I must stop, though I believe I like writing to you better

[58] *Letters*, I, p.475. Further references in this paragraph are to this page.
[59] Lee, p.290.

than seeing you'.[60] Here 'to' could as well be 'about', as Virginia has just described a morning of writing about Vanessa, and the novel and its character have been leaking into her letter. Writing to and about Vanessa seem almost overlapping activities. Virginia's statement that she prefers her writing to 'seeing you', the real person, is troubling. She explains this preference by writing 'I mean, when we meet at Gordon Sqre, the lyric mood has to be suppressed.'[61] Gordon Square at this time was a public space – as far as any Bloomsbury Group space can be called public – and the sisters would have been accompanied by other family members and friends; Virginia implies that her 'lyric mood' about Vanessa had freer rein in private discourses. This suggests that for all the frogs' choruses that Virginia participated in, she retained some of her Vanessa-inspired lyricism for intimate exchanges that involved only the two of them—which she appears to have been willing to do at the expense of seeing the source of her inspiration in real life.

Describing Ralph's similar engagement in fantasies about Katharine, Virginia depicts his thoughts with sympathy and, importantly, with irony: 'he scarcely knew whether they beheld dreams or realities' (150). She relates the 'painful [...] collision between what he dreamt of her and what she was', and, in fact, there is even something terrifying in the way that Ralph, grasping the back of a chair, a solid object, remains 'possessed' by his dream, unable to shake off 'the atmosphere [...] of a dream' (150—1). He needs to feed 'the shell of the old dream with the flesh of life' and feels 'fire out of [its] phantom eyes' (150). Especially in the beginning, the dream behaves like a vampire: the 'enraged ghost' comes 'to him when he sat alone' and fills the real Katharine's place 'in imaginary scenes' of transactions 'almost every night' (91). Despite Ralph being 'well aware that the bulk of Katharine was not represented in his dreams at all', when he encounters the living person, he is 'bewildered by the fact that she had nothing to do with his dream of her', which demonstrates the strength of the phantom's spell (91). To emphasise this rift between the phantom Katharine and the real woman, Ralph is 'struck dumb' midway through the novel, when he sees Katharine in daylight for the first time (246).

As the couple draw closer together, Ralph suffers from the challenges the real woman poses to the phantom—even when he calls his feeling for Katharine 'love', he laments 'how terrible' the difference between the two is, and maintains that 'he had lost something in speaking to Katharine, for, after all, was the Katharine whom he loved the same as the real Katharine?' (319) Indeed, the Katharine he loves is the hypnotic revenant; although there are sketchy links between the vision and reality, such as the 'crimson' or

[60] *Letters*, II, p.233.
[61] *Letters*, II, p.232.

blood-coloured scarf about Katharine's face when Ralph first sees her in daylight, Ralph finds her unattainable and difficult to describe: 'everything about her seemed rapid, fragmentary, and full of a kind of racing speed' (246). Even in chapter 25, in which the couple establish their special friendship and which is easily read as the turning-point in their romantic relationship, Ralph continues to rely on imagery that does not properly depict Katharine. In his eyes, her figure has 'indescribable height, and romance seemed to surround her from the floating of a purple veil which the light air filled' (348). Ralph fails to pick on the colour-coded message of the suffragist purple, which hints at Katharine's modernity, and instead imagines her "like a ship in full sail"—echoing Mrs Hilbery's contention that the women of the past were like "ships with white sails" (348, 118). His continued failure in seeing Katharine without the veil of his fantasies intimates his future behaviour in their married life.

THREE PICTURES

Ralph's imaginary of Katharine contains several elaborately constructed, extensive images, some of which deserve closer examination due to their durability and connections to notable images in Virginia's oeuvre. Intimately related to these images are Virginia's depictions of Vanessa as central, feminine, maternal, and prophetic, which continued to flourish during the composition of *Night and Day*.[62] She pictured Vanessa as the focal-point amidst the chaos of Charleston and their wider circle: all creatures – including 'ducks, chickens and children', 'a whole colony of hares, rabbits, chickens and pigs' and 'Belgian hares, governesses, children, gardeners, hens, ducks' – gravitated towards her.[63] Virginia emphasised Vanessa's majesty by picturing her 'presiding' over 'the most astonishing ménage' or 'the usual hurly burly'.[64] Already at Wissett Lodge, the domestic atmosphere created by Vanessa impressed Virginia—'I've seldom enjoyed myself more than I did with you, and I cant make out exactly how you manage. One seems to get into such a contented state of mind.'[65] These epistolary visions of Vanessa's centrality and stability are, albeit in Vanessa's letters treated

[62] The exact years of the novel's composition have been debated. Lee dates its conception in 1916 (p.324), whereas Leonard recalls Virginia having begun it sometime in 1913, soon after finishing *The Voyage Out*. But, as Briggs notes, Leonard's memory was not always accurate; in any case Virginia was working on an early draft in late 1914 (p.34).
[63] *Letters*, II, p.149, 248, 355.
[64] *Letters*, II, p.355, 383.
[65] *Letters*, II, p.108.

with her typical ironic and distancing attitude, reiterated and embellished in Virginia's novel.[66]

One such image is Ralph's vision of Katharine among the animals of the Regent's Park Zoo—one of the Stephen children's favourite haunts. Picturing Katharine within frames of animal life, Ralph 'wished to keep this distance between them—the distance which separates the devotee from the image in the shrine' (390). Katharine easily appears divine 'against a background of' motley creation, who also appear to worship her: camels 'slanted their heavy-lidded eyes to her', 'giraffes fastidiously observed her' and elephants receive treats from 'her outstretched hands.' Virginia paints Ralph's global vision of lush animal life, revolving around his idol, with numerous colours: pink, brown, gold, and a lot of green. Katharine appears particularly magnificent 'outlined against the deep green waters' and 'silvery fish', and in another typically Woolfian trope, she is linked with caterpillars and a recently metamorphosed butterfly: she 'marvel[s] at the purple circles marked upon the rich tussore wings of some lately emerged and semi-conscious butterfly' (390—1). The suffragist colours of purple and green significantly feature in the vicinity of the recognisable feminist image of feminine development, along with circles—a shape that Vanessa often repeated in her work.

Ralph's vision climaxes in an optical carnival of sorts, as he observes '[t]he heat of the air, and the bloom of heavy flowers, which swam in water or rose stiffly from great red jars, together with the display of curious patterns and fantastic shapes' (391). This jungle-like atmosphere evoked by the collage of the divine Katharine and the miscellany of animals is inhospitable to human beings, making them 'look pale and to fall silent'; indeed it is related not only to Virginia's picturing of Vanessa presiding over her animalistic jumble in Charleston, but also to her repeated use of the jungle as a fantastic, uncanny space, which appears antithetical to the world of men and often strangely feminine.[67]

The compilation of little creatures and bustling, vivid colours also calls to mind 'Kew Gardens', on which, unsurprisingly, Virginia was at work around the same time. This scene in *Night and Day* seems like a training-ground for the short-story with a similar vision with increasingly modernist aesthetics, exemplifying one manner of opening up Virginia's sororal imaginary. 'Kew Gardens' moves a step forward from this scene's reliance on an adorned

[66] As Vanessa wrote to Roger, she did not 'often worry about my character really' or others' representations of it; in the same letter she provides an example of how others' views on her come to influence her actions: 'I'm looked upon as an authority upon babies, and give Mary a great deal of advice about hers' (*Selected Letters*, p.181).

[67] This lush jungle is an early location in Virginia's imaginary: Her early fragment 'The Monkeys' takes place in a colourful yet vaguely threatening jungle. Besides Helen Ambrose's embroidery, the image features in Woolf's children's story 'Nurse Lugton's Curtain' and its predecessor, Julia Stephen's 'Emlycaunt' fairy-tale for her children—which Vanessa later illustrated. I will return to the jungle with *Flush*.

central feminine figure and disperses Vanessa's visual presence into the narrative's Bellesque focus on colour, movement and the changing perspectives, the variety of which is already intimated by the numerous animals either looking at Katharine or being looked at by her. This removal of the Vanessa-inspired central force in favour of a visually receptive, highly mobile narrative focus suggests Virginia's evolving aesthetic concerns and anticipates some of the ways she dealt with the multiplying demands of modern form, such as increasing the numbers of lookers-on in her writing and the continued inspiration she found in Vanessa's work. Questions of visual variety – concerning both the numerousness of gazes and variation in their positions – would preoccupy Virginia's later writing as well as her future characterisations of her sister—witness Lily Briscoe's exclamation about Mrs Ramsay: 'Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with'.[68] Virginia's preoccupation with creating new aesthetic forms that would express diversity of viewpoints coincided with her growing avoidance of fixed, singular representations of her sister.

Another evocative picture is the one Ralph sets out to conjure with his so-called 'relics': 'the head of a goddess' in a book of photographs of Greek statues, a note from her about their meeting at the Zoo, and a flower picked during their visit to Kew Gardens (408). Ironically, he believes that with the help of these objects, he can 'visualize her so clearly that no deception or delusion [is] possible', and yet, of course, his imagination of her is a delusion. The imaginary nature of the Katharine he evokes is evinced by his power over her: as her creator, '[h]e made her sit upon the seat beside him', like Virginia 'made [Vanessa] wear a blue dress' (409).[69] As I have already discussed in connection with Helen Ambrose, the comparison to a Greek statue both celebrates the timeless beauty of the Vanessa character and inescapably metamorphoses the woman into inanimate matter, recalling Irigaray's immobilizing 'borrowed notions'.[70] Ralph's choice of media, too, and their further manipulation – he covers a part of the already necessarily selective photograph of a three-dimensional representation of a goddess – emphasises the distance between the original and its partial, edited representation. Piteously, considering the distance between his representation of Katharine and the woman herself, his present meditation continues to reveal his most pressing urge as participating in 'utmost fulness of communion': he fantasises about them 'pass[ing] in and out of each other's minds'; in his 'united' state with her, he feels more 'filled' than he has ever felt 'in singleness' (409). This dream of 'the

[68] *To the Lighthouse*, p.161.
[69] *Letters*, II, p.232.
[70] Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.217.

flawless union [...] born of their association' finally leads Ralph to name his feeling for Katharine as "love", eventually aiding bringing about their engagement. His later desire to 'possess' Katharine – his grounds for consenting to marry her – hints that Ralph's dream of a flawless union would entail Katharine submerging into him, rather than a communion of two separate entities.[71]

Finally, in Ralph's last extended fantasy about Katharine, she is figured as the light of a lighthouse. As we have seen, Virginia figured her sister as a life-organising principle to their small circle, and in a comparable fashion, Katharine organises the lives of both her family and the young couples in the novel. Her centrality and sustaining force are embodied in Ralph's imagining of a lighthouse in the midst of chaos: he is beset by 'an odd image' of 'the flying bodies of lost birds, who were dashed senseless, by the gale' and he sees the Hilberys' house as 'the centre of the dark, flying wilderness of the world; the justification for the welter of confusion surrounding it; the steady light which cast its beams, like those of a lighthouse, with searching composure over the trackless waste' (417—8). In the midst of the world's senseless violence, the Hilberys' drawing-room appears imbued with beneficent light, and 'the figure of Katharine herself' stands at the centre, as a presence almost spiritual: 'He did not see her in the body; he seemed curiously to see her as a shape of light, the light itself.' (419) This image of Katharine, or Vanessa, as the beam of the lighthouse is of course a predecessor to Mrs Ramsay, another central woman of life-sustaining and invigorating force, who identifies with the light of a lighthouse.[72] In Ralph's vision 'the steady light' tries to produce 'composure'—as Mrs Ramsay does during the dinner scene in 'The Window', as the 'central line down the middle' does in both Lily's painting and in *To the Lighthouse* itself, and as Virginia envisioned Vanessa doing—partly following their mother's example, but mostly radically refashioning the meanings of steady, well-composed social life.[73]

GOOD AND EVIL

These images of Ralph's are attractive and beautifully composed, and ones that Virginia kept returning to. However, they do not populate *Night and Day* unchallenged, their most outspoken critic being the subject of these fancies, Katharine. Ralph, also, occasionally

[71] 'He wished to dominate her, to possess her.' (518) Ralph's wish may be read in contrast and in response to the phantom Katharine's possession of him in the beginning.
[72] See e.g. Stella McNichol, '*To the Lighthouse*', in *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, ed. by Paul Schellinger (Routledge, 2014), pp.1337—8 (1338).
[73] *Letters*, III, p.385.

wants to question his fantasies, and therefore invites Katharine to his home, hoping to be disillusioned by seeing her in the 'unsparing and revealing' light of family-life (394). Instead, Katharine ends up enlivening and lighting up the conversation between Ralph and his siblings, and her presence opens Ralph's eyes to the 'tacit understanding of family life at its best': 'All that brotherhood and sisterhood and a common childhood in a common past.' (402) Katharine, then, vehemently rejects Ralph's dreams about her, trying to assert herself as a quotidian, familial person: "I'm a matter-of-fact, prosaic, rather ordinary character: I order the dinner, I pay the bills, I do the accounts, I wind up the clock, and I never look at a book." (404) The characterisation well suits young Vanessa Stephen, running her father's household, to the detail of emphasising her aversion to books.[74]

Echoing Vanessa's worry that Virginia's characterisation of her was becoming confused with Virginia's (and others') knowledge of her 'in the flesh',[75] Katharine accuses Ralph of being unable to tell the difference between her actual self and his dream of her:

> "You come and see me among flowers and pictures, and think me mysterious, romantic, and all the rest of it. Being yourself very inexperienced and very emotional, you go home and invent a story about me, and now you can't separate me from the person you've imagined me to be. You call that, I suppose, being in love; as a matter of fact it's being in delusion. All romantic people are the same [...] My mother spends her life in making stories about the people she's fond of. But I won't have you do it about me, if I can help it." (404)

Katharine's perception of Ralph placing her image "among flowers and pictures" to enhance its romance is, as we have seen, correct. She also refers to her mother's hopeless attempts to put together a biography of her father, which will never come to fruition because Mrs Hilbery is afraid of privately facing his ignoble behaviour and making it public. The reference suggests a resemblance between biographical writing and Ralph's infatuated fancies and makes it clear that Katharine does not want to be the subject of such touched-up, fantastic life-writing.

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[74] Although Virginia was always the more voracious reader of the two, Vanessa was far from disinterested. For example, as Virginia was composing *Night and Day*, Vanessa declared herself a fan of Harriet Martineau, asking her sister whether she knew anything about her 'and her works' and learning passages by heart with Duncan (*Selected Letters*, p.211).

[75] *Selected Letters*, p.59.

Nonetheless, she is the subject of Ralph's dreams. Her rejection is followed by a near-Shakespearean exchange between herself and Ralph, which opens questions about the realness and ethics of fantasising – or writing – about someone:

> "You can't help it," he said.
> "I warn you it's the source of all evil."
> "And of all good," he added.
> "You'll find out that I'm not what you think me."
> "Perhaps. But I shall gain more than I lose."
> "If such gain's worth having."
> [...] "That may be what we have to face," he said. "There may be nothing else. Nothing but what we imagine."
> "The reason of our loneliness", she mused (404—5)

The quick, comedic pace disguises the debate's seriousness, and yet the questions made are of a profoundly moral nature and applicable to all forms of auto/biographical creating. Ralph seems to have no qualms about kidnapping Katharine's identity without her consent; where she believes that his romantic imaginations are the "source of all evil", he finds them the source "of all good", and, possibly, the only thing there really is. Ralph's suggestion that "[t]here may be nothing else" represents one extreme in the battle between 'dreams and realities'; Katharine, likewise a dreamer, does not argue with this contention, but identifies such prioritisation of dreams before reality as the "reason of our loneliness": Ralph's characterising fantasies might, instead of a way to connect with his beloved, inhibit attachment. Katharine, like Vanessa, is aggravated by the possibility that Ralph's dream of her is not like her real self. But Ralph's dream of her – or Virginia's dream of Vanessa – allows him to possess her; though it is only a dream, it is possibly the only thing he can possess and so he holds on to it, making it, perhaps, the realest thing to Ralph.

Wanting to connect, Katharine and Ralph settle on a compromise: since Ralph is, as Katharine says, "going to go on dreaming and imagining and making up stories about [her]", instead of "pretending that [they]'re riding in a forest, or landing on an island" – these, as we will see later, are in fact Katharine's private images – he will "think of [her] ordering dinner, paying bills, doing the accounts, showing old ladies the relics, [...] looking up dates in the Dictionary of National Biography [...and] forgetting [her] purse"

(406).[76] These mundane fantasies, though still dreams, are a step closer to being reflections of Katharine's perception of her reality, and therefore, in her words, "better" (406). They work to Ralph's advantage, and, for better or for worse, he becomes engaged to her. Significantly, *Night and Day* is an embodiment of such a compromise: it consists of Virginia's everyday stories about Vanessa, in one perspective "mysterious, romantic, and all the rest of it", and in another, "a matter-of-fact, prosaic, rather ordinary character" (404).

Virginia was aware of the discord between her idolising fantasies about her sister and Vanessa's matter-of-factness, and found it amusing. In a letter to Duncan, Virginia recites gossip she has heard about an exchange between Vanessa and Mary Hutchinson—'the great story of Vanessa has had another chapter added to it': Vanessa had told her husband's mistress that "Its time you got off the sofa Mary".[77] These incongruous moments of amusement also tended to highlight the made-up and mediated nature of 'the great story of Vanessa'. Virginia also enjoyed coming up with imaginary interventions to her fantasies by the serious, honest Vanessa character: letting her imagination roam, she imagines this new chapter in 'the great story': 'Vanessa is represented like a tawny old Goddess, all crusted with brine and barnacles shouldering her way out of the sea—But there! How could there be a sofa in the sea, Nessa will ask?'[78] Noting Virginia's awareness of the contrast between 'a tawny old Goddess' and Vanessa's matter-of-fact mind which would not allow any sofas in the sea, it is no wonder that these two views of Vanessa's character are represented by two different characters in *Night and Day*: the person who is infatuated with her and the voice of reason herself. Vanessa's imaginary intervention does suggest that Virginia was aware of the questionable nature of her dreams of 'brine and barnacles', and it also hints at Vanessa having reacted to her portrayals in reality, too, which would account for the teasing and ironic tone that can be detected both in some of Virginia's epistolary imaginings and in the distance her narrator keeps to Ralph in *Night and Day*; sometimes, it seems, these tawny goddesses surfaced just in order to elicit a reaction from the elder sister—disapproval being a better reward than no reaction.

Katharine believes that making up stories about people one is fond of is the source of all evil; Ralph, contrastingly, holds that it is the source of all good—the reader's position will depend on whether or not they find the ending of *Night and Day* a satisfying, happy one, since the novel would not end in their engagement if Ralph had not become possessed by his

[76] Even the detail of Katharine forgetting her purse has an equivalent in Virginia's real-life characterisation of her sister: as Spalding notes, she 'seized on Vanessa's "generous talent for losing umbrellas and forgetting messages"' (p.130). Amusingly, reading letters from 1917, it appears that Virginia, not Vanessa, was in fact the one in the habit of forgetting her umbrellas. (*Letters*, II, pp.195—207)

[77] *Letters*, II, p.350.

[78] *Letters*, II, p.350.

dreams of her. The questions about the ethics of such story-making, invoked by the words 'good' and 'evil', are central concerns especially for relational life-writing: whose perspective, or whose truth, about the character is the right one, or the one that gets told? Some auto/biographies have responded to these ethical concerns about representing others by '"integrating the perspective of the other"'; feminist scholars like Mary Mason have suggested that especially women's autobiographical writings 'create the female self by exploring her relation with a fully rendered Other' and generally explore a 'sense of shared identity with other women'.[79] Anne Rüggemeier even proposes reading 'relationality as a new genre [which] introduces "a new ethic of the autobiographical"' by opting for representations of both self and the other that remain open.[80] This practice of rendering the relational other as completely as possible and the insistence on open representations for both the self and the other are useful in an investigation of Katharine's identities and anticipate the 'democratic relationship between the biographer and his subject' Virginia's 'New Biography' would argue for.[81] This is also where I locate the most important difference between Ralph's imaginations of Katharine and the novel's overall treatment of the Vanessa character: whilst Ralph's idealised visions are restrictive, the author of *Night and Day* concedes to the possibility of unfixed character.

Katharine and her resistance to Ralph's fantasies may then be read as an attempt to integrate the perspective of the other who was Virginia's subject. The ending of the novel is ambiguous. Katharine and her initially private interiority become consumed by Ralph and the fire symbolising him. After Katharine has told Ralph that "You've destroyed my loneliness", he makes her describe how she sees him now: 'he persuaded her into a broken statement, beautiful to him, charged with extreme excitement as she spoke of the dark red fire, and the smoke twined round it, making him feel that he had stepped over the threshold into the faintly lit vastness of another mind' (534). It is possible that Katharine's privacy survives this intrusion—even the last page repeats the perpetual question 'What woman did he see?' (537). Although '[t]ogether they groped in this difficult region, where the unfinished, the unfulfilled, the unwritten, the unreturned, came together', these fragments come together 'in their *ghostly* way', wearing a mere '*semblance* of the complete and the satisfactory' (537).[82] Ralph's 'vision of an orderly world' seems fragile indeed—but it might also be open (536). They have now found a connection in 'desiring more than anything

[79] Stanford Friedman (1998), pp.78—79.
[80] Julia Watson, 'Is Relationality a Genre?', *European Journal of Life Writing*, Vol 5 (2016), <http://ejlw.eu/article/view/201/382> [accessed 18.7.2018], paragraph 19.
[81] Laura Marcus, p.97.
[82] My emphases.

movement, freedom from scrutiny, silence, and the open air' (531), and the novel's final question remains 'And where was she walking, and who was her companion?' (537) I propose that this state of being 'unfinished' and 'unwritten' may be read as a positive one: as the ending retains the question of *who* Katharine is, it also seems to expand such an openness to Ralph—'who was her companion?' Alongside asking 'who' the passage also asks 'where', associating this openness not only with the identities at stake but also with the space towards which they are moving.

SISTERLY SPACE

It is exactly in the potential openness and ambiguity of space – domestic and internal – that *Night and Day* comes closest to answering Butler's question as to whether kinship is always heterosexual and patriarchal. Fittingly with women's biographical traditions, throughout the novel, women's subjectivities – especially Katharine's – are considered within the context of domestic space and alternatives to its usual organisation. This deliberation is strongly rooted in the Bloomsbury artists' preoccupation with the home in the 1910s, as social, domestic, familial and aesthetic arrangements interacted and overlapped. Despite its stucco front, *Night and Day* manifests symptoms of Vanessa's work and thinking on interior design having tunnelled their way through into her sister's reflections about domestic aesthetics, which invites an examination of the extent to which the home might be a sisterly space. Whereas Virginia's shared experiences with Vanessa had previously helped her imagine a subversive sisterly space, in the late 1910s Vanessa's professional and personal innovations enabled, inspired and buoyed Virginia's – for now more slowly developing – reconfigurations of domesticity and family.

Night and Day continues to think about, and undermine, the legacy of the daughter's place in the patriarchal home. The novel was composed when many Bloomsbury members were refashioning their domestic arrangements – Virginia and Leonard introduced a new kind of professional production into their home by setting up the Hogarth Press in 1917; Vanessa moved to Charleston in 1916, along with Duncan, his lover David Garnett and her two sons – and reflecting these domestic revolutions, the novel's interrogation of kinship and family is set within a domestic context. As Morag Shiach demonstrates in her analysis of Bloomsbury homes, '[t]he significance of domestic space […] is closely connected to the ways in which subjectivity is constructed and understood in the modern period.'[83] In their

[83] Morag Shiach, 'Chapter 4. Domestic Bloomsbury', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. by Victoria Rosner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.57—70 (58).

commitment to individuality, the Bloomsbury home is devoted to mapping and 'imagining different kinds of modern subjectivity', and thus 'notions of the familial were reinvented through and in' the personal relationships of the members.[84]

Virginia's letters to her sister from July 1918 recount a chain of events set in motion by yellow Omega chair-covers and one of Vanessa's pictures, which Virginia declared had 'changed [her] views upon aesthetics'.[85] Considering her own developing aesthetics, Virginia concluded that 'there is a quality in your picture which though perceptible is at present much beyond me', because 'my aesthetic feelings are so undeveloped'.[86] She states that 'I had better begin at the very beginning' and 'humbly' hopes that 'this semi-conscious process of coming to dislike one colour very much and liking a picture better and better points to some sort of live instinct trying to come to existence'.[87] Finally, her long account of her chair-cover crisis closes with a direct invitation to Vanessa to continue to influence her changing aesthetics: 'What I am driving at is this; could you see your way to lend me any more pictures?'[88] This aesthetic crisis alerts Virginia to consider rooms as aesthetic wholes, and it sees her setting up Vanessa as an example and guide. Most importantly for this thesis, it places Vanessa at the centre of Virginia's changing aesthetic views during this period—the more general influence of the Bloomsbury artists and the Omega is observable too, but Vanessa and her particular influence stand out more than, and as a factor distinguishable from, the rest. Virginia's aesthetics developed in continuous comparison with the views others held, especially Vanessa.

Studying sisters' role in women's development, Kuba observes that comparison between the self and sister is one of the most constant processes in identity formation; such comparisons could be founded on a number of things, including 'interests, values, [and] lifestyle'.[89] Since, as Kuba demonstrates, '[s]ister identity emerge[s] from these comparisons', it is unsurprising that Virginia kept on comparing her home and taste with her sister's, whilst she was producing experiments that placed her in the vanguard of European avant-garde in the 1910s.[90] Lee notes that '[t]he comparison she kept making between Asheham and Charleston, [...] was not only motivated by sisterly rivalry.'[91] Indeed, it was also grounded in sisterly admiration and desire to explore their similarities and differences. This, as Lee writes, 'was part of the debate [Virginia] was having with

[84] Shiach, p.58, 65.
[85] *Letters*, II, p.257. See Lee, p.370 and *Letters*, II, pp.258—9 for more details.
[86] *Letters*, II, p.259.
[87] *Letters*, II, p.259.
[88] *Letters*, II, p.260.
[89] Kuba, p.200.
[90] Kuba, p.206.
[91] Lee, pp.370—371.

herself about a whole style of living. Could everything – paintings, furnishings, chair-covers, clothes, forms of social life, domestic arrangements, [...] – have a coherent value and represent an attitude to life?'[92] Virginia's taste in interior design was like her fashion preference – 'dove colour and old lavender, with a lace collar, and lawn wristlets'[93] – it did not really match the Omega products, although she was curious about the Workshops. However, she continues to endow Vanessa with unreserved admiration, even in an Omega context: 'I've just been to the Omega show, and had the great pleasure of seeing your picture sold'.[94] Effectively, Vanessa was now the greater modernist innovator of the two, both in terms of experiments in representational and decorative art as well as in domestic arrangements. It would take another decade – or two – for Virginia to match her sister's formal radicalism, although both *Night and Day* and her short-stories written in the latter half of the 1910s evidence willingness to follow Vanessa's example.

SOLID OBJECTS IN *NIGHT AND DAY*

A related fascination with solid objects and interior decoration runs deep in *Night and Day*. Virginia enjoyed describing rooms, objects and paintings in her letters to Vanessa; likewise, the narrator of *Night and Day* pauses to provide the reader with thoroughgoing, detailed descriptions. Virginia's desire to describe is related to her declaration that 'I see I shall have to write a novel entirely about carpets, old silver, cut glass and furniture'; her short-story 'Solid Objects' imagined the fate of one too possessed by their love of objects, but already in *Night and Day* there is a lot of such attention paid to interior décor.[95] The decorations are very emblematic of their owners – witness Rodney's room with its 'limited' space (70) – but they also have a decorative value of their own, evident in the narrator's zooming in on aesthetically arranged details.

Flower arrangements particularly catch her eye, and descriptions of these often appear equally applicable to Vanessa's floral still-lifes. Even more specific references can be speculated upon as we consider other detailed bouquets in *Night and Day*, such as this one in Rodney's room: 'An oval Venetian mirror stood above the fireplace, and reflected duskily in its spotted depths the faint yellow and crimson of a jarful of tulips which stood [...] upon the mantelpiece' (70). Similar oval shape and dusky colours feature in *The Tub*, which

[92] Lee, p.371.
[93] *Letters*, II, p.111. This is, of course, a humorous exaggeration, but it gives a sense of the difference between her taste and the Omega.
[94] *Letters*, II, pp.285—286.
[95] *Letters*, II, p.284.

Vanessa was working on in 1917. Vanessa originally meant the large picture for the garden room, but it was never installed—instead it was kept folded up.[96] *The Tub* has received notable critical attention, not all of which is relevant here. Photographic evidence suggests that the setting of the intimate bathing scene is in fact the primary sitting-room in Charleston, which was 'the warmest spot in the house'; therefore, as Christopher Reed suggests, 'its appropriation as a bathroom would disrupt everyone's routines'.[97] Rodney's flowers are of course found in his warm sitting-room, and these rooms begin to reference the juxtapositioning of private and public spaces to which I will return later.

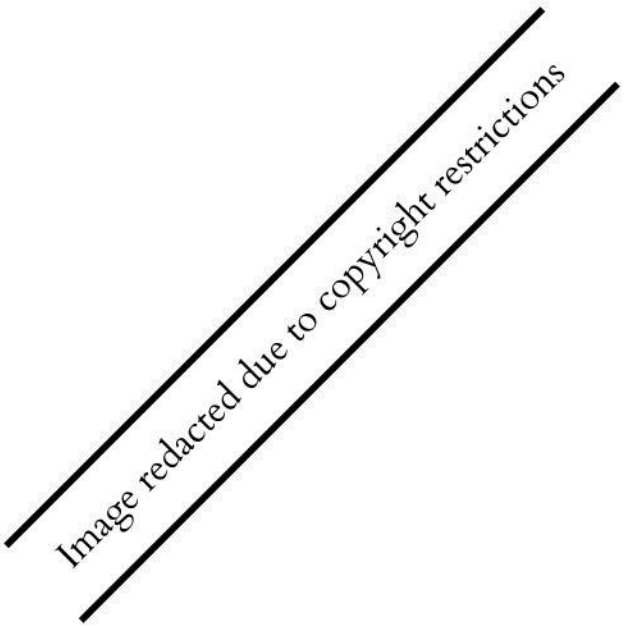

Figure 13. Vanessa Bell, *The Tub* (1917).

For my current purposes, Spalding's reading of this puzzling picture is a useful one: noting Vanessa's frequent use of the circle in her decorative work, she emphasises its connotations of 'fullness and stability', which Vanessa evidently found 'peculiarly satisfying'.[98] Spalding suggests that it is 'possible that the strained relationship between the tub and the standing figure in this large painting is an unconscious expression of her own sense of incompleteness. [...] her position at this time was one of relative isolation', and the triangular relationship with Duncan and Bunny demanded precisely channelled emotions.[99]

[96] 'Vanessa Bell: The Tub, 1917', *Tate.org*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bell-the-tub-t02010> [accessed 13.3.2020].
[97] Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p.193.
[98] Spalding, p.171.
[99] Spalding, p.171.

Spalding also attentively observed that the three flowers in *The Tub* recall *Iceland Poppies*, which Vanessa painted during Virginia and Clive's flirtation: 'As before, one is separated by its colour from the rest': one is yellow, another red, and the third one white with red touches.[100] Therefore, like the oval and dusky colours, the 'yellow and crimson' flowers in Rodney's room may be associated with those in Vanessa's paintings—after all Rodney is also involved in not just one but two love triangles.

Interestingly, this specific flower motif is repeated during a scene describing the Hilberys having dinner. They feature in the middle of the set table, which is also described with Virginia's usual relish:

> They were all dressed for dinner and, and, indeed, the prettiness of the dinner-table merited that compliment. There was no cloth upon the table, and the china made regular circles of deep blue upon the shining brown wood. In the middle there was a bowl of tawny red and yellow chrysanthemums, and one of pure white, so fresh that the narrow petals were curved backwards into a firm white ball. (97)

In general, the dinner, with its dressed-up participants, the 'prettiness' – a word that Vanessa associated with the aesthetic of the past they rebelled against – as well as the 'the heads of three famous Victorians surve[ying] this entertainment' from the walls, has an evident Victorian touch (97). However, the fact that there is no tablecloth – suggestive of Gordon Square's dangerous experimental living 'without table napkins'[101] – hints that something, or someone, at the dinner is a representative of new, modern domesticity. The 'regular circles of deep blue' are evocative of the motifs in Vanessa's decorative work, and circles are the dominating theme on the Charleston dining table.

Centre-stage is taken by the chrysanthemums, which grew in the Charleston garden and were often painted by Vanessa. The solitary white blossom stands out from the 'tawny' ones because of its singleness and purity: the flower is 'so fresh that the narrow petals were curved backwards into a firm white ball', in a striking image of strength and sweetness. Notably, the flowers are also presented in a bowl, as are Sally Seton's flower heads in *Mrs Dalloway*, in a strongly luminous moment of connection and private feelings between two women.[102] The image of the bowl and the singular flower also resonate with many of the central images of 'Sketch of the Past'—such as imagining life as 'a bowl that one fills and

[100] Spalding, p.171.
[101] 'Old Bloomsbury', p.46.
[102] *Mrs Dalloway*, p.29.

fills and fills' and the moment of grasping the realness of a flower as defined by its connection to the whole, the earth.[103]

This is to suggest not only the strongly resonant nature of the imagery the sisters employed in representing their herstory but also how central it became in their artistic explorations that refigured social and familial organisation of life. As *The Tub* and the passages from *Night and Day* demonstrate, the sisters repeatedly produced variations of related circular and floral themes in their visualisations of modern domesticity. Virginia's echoes of the specific elements of Vanessa's work might have been conscious and so might have communicated a wealth of things outsiders can only speculate upon. Certainly Vanessa's modernist domestic aesthetics provided a backdrop for Virginia's gradually radicalising formal experiments and as such are constantly evoked, though not always in absolute agreement, underpinning the undercurrent of sisterly exchange that runs through Virginia's engagement with both modernising aesthetics and social and familial compositions.

THE NEW, BARE HOME

In the discussion of aesthetics and the polar opposites that informed it – masculine/feminine, public/private – Charleston placed itself firmly with the latter poles, and so continued to confirm the related juxtaposition of Victorian/Bloomsbury. *Night and Day*, too, participates in this discussion about aesthetics and domesticity, which was most tangible in life at Charleston—Vanessa's family was already suggesting some possible answers to the novel's search for alternative forms of kinship. The juxtapositions, which sustained first the Omega's and then Charleston's self-definition and their attitudes to aesthetic and social questions, can also be detected in *Night and Day* and its characters' attempts to understand their places in the modern world. As Reed notes, the Omega had sought to change the public's taste, and had 'made the conditions of domesticity its standard for modernity, projecting the values of home life outward onto the public realm in both its aesthetic and socio-political initiatives.'[104] After the group's inward turn Vanessa's Charleston continued valuing the same aesthetic and socio-political standards on a more private level. These two sections of life were intimately related to one another; as Shiach writes, '[m]embers of the group saw their various domestic spaces as providing

[103] 'Sketch of the Past', p.78, 84.
[104] Reed, p.5.

opportunities to develop and sustain the network of personal and intimate relationships that fed their creativity.'[105]

One of Vanessa's first impulses when moving her family to Bloomsbury had been to get rid of a lot of the Hyde Park Gate furniture. This decluttering desire followed her to Charleston: shortly after moving to the farmhouse, she wrote to Roger: 'I hope to carry out the idea I have always had of bedrooms with the minimum of furniture'.[106] At the Hilberys' home, Katharine's room stands apart from the rest of the crowded, cluttered house—it most prominently differs from the room where her grandfather's old possessions are exhibited which is 'like a chapel in a cathedral, or a grotto in a cave' and 'crowded with relics' (7). Contrastingly, Katharine's room is relatively empty, only containing objects genuinely meaningful for her: her 'own upper room' is defined by 'its books, its papers pressed between the leaves of dictionaries, and the table that could be cleared for work'—in other words, the instruments necessary for her mathematical pursuits (328). The notable absence of her fiancé's photograph highlights the room's privacy. However, the conventional surroundings delimit the privacy: she feels compelled to hide her mathematics in dictionaries. The relative bareness of Katharine's room is also emphasised, making the bedroom sound like it is aspiring to Charleston conditions: 'The room, with its combination of luxury and bareness, [...] its shabby carpet and bare walls, had a powerful air of Katharine herself.' (362—3) At first, 'bare walls' are possibly the last thing to be associated with Charleston, but the whole of Katharine's room does embody the Bloomsbury drive to organise domestic space to be supportive of individual pursuits. The room is reflective of Katharine's subjectivity and her dedication to her mathematical work: it quietly resists the Victorian domestic conventions through its decluttered bareness and the fact that the mathematics books occupy elevated space.

Waiting for her cousin in her room, Cassandra begins fingering a book she takes down from 'the shelf above the bed' (363). A further opposition to the relics room and its 'oppressive' 'ceremony of ancestor worship' (337) is evoked as the narrator draws attention to the usual function of this shelf above the bed: 'In most houses this shelf is the ledge upon which the last relics of religious belief lodge themselves' (363). Katharine's private solace is no Bible, but 'battered' and 'enigmatical' books of mathematics, which even Cassandra misinterprets to have patriarchal value: 'Cassandra judged them to be old school-books belonging to Uncle Trevor, and piously, though eccentrically, preserved by his daughter.' However, Cassandra has also nursed an interest in geometry, and so she, 'curled upon

[105] Shiach, p.65.
[106] Quoted in Anscombe, pp.76—7.

Katharine's quilt', reads. Although Katharine, with good reason – when her mother finds out she calls it "dreadfully ugly" (511) – usually hides her passion from her family, no aggravation comes out of her cousin, a kinswoman of her age, finding out about her hobby: in fact, Cassandra comfortably settles into Katharine's private space and becomes absorbed in Katharine's clandestine pursuit. Katharine finds her cousin with the book, exclaiming it has "changed" her "whole life"; however, they do not have the opportunity to examine this shared interest in depth, because they must get dressed for dinner with their family and Katharine's fiancé (363).

A ROOM OF HER OWN

As a daughter at home Katharine, then, has access to only comparatively private space, which is subject to interruptions. Unlike Katharine, Mary Datchet does have a room of her own, which is established as a difference between the two young women during their first meaningful encounter. Katharine compliments Mary by assuming that she "must be very clever" because she "live[s] alone in this room" (55). Mary reflects on the circumstances of having a room of her own:

> "It means, chiefly, a power of being disagreeable to one's own family, I think. I have that, perhaps. I didn't want to live at home, and I told my father. He didn't like it. … But then I have a sister, and you haven't have you?"
> "No, I haven't any sisters."
> "You are writing a life of your grandfather?" Mary pursued. (55)

Mary, like Katharine, belongs to a family where the father's opinion counts the most; however, unlike Katharine who does not have sisters, Mary is able to live on her own because she has a sister, who stays behind managing the father's house. While Elizabeth Datchet fills the vacuum left by their dead mother, Mary can have a room of her own. Even Denham's situation is similar: his family is also managed by a maternal elder sister, Joan. Mary's life demonstrates many of the central claims of *A Room of One's Own*—as Katharine enviously reflects, 'in such a room one could work—one could have a life of one's own' (286). Mary's circumstances rely on the existence of an elder sister whose possible independence and share in Mary's experiences must be sacrificed to the patriarchal family.

As Mary's next question about Katharine's work on her grandfather's life suggests, the gendered condition of the daughter's situation is also defined by her vertical family.

Instead of having sisters, Katharine has a grandfather, and as a result she can only wish for a room of her own through marriage: "why I'm marrying him is [...] I want to have a house of my own. It isn't possible at home." (202—3) No option that would take her outside patriarchal family constructs is available to Katharine, whilst Elizabeth Datchet's self-sacrifice, a sisterly act, can undermine the structure enough to allow for her younger sister an additional option of creating and possessing a feminine space or private working space. It is worth remembering that the novel ends in tears as Katharine gazes up to Mary's room and the light from there 'swam like an ocean of gold behind her tears' (535). The ocean has been a recurring image in Katharine's daydreams, and here the image links the light coming from Mary to Katharine's private world and conjures a wistful atmosphere of yearning; whatever the future holds for the soon-to-be-married couple, they already find it impossible to bridge over to the world Mary resides in.

The domestic spaces that Vanessa dominated and organised during the 1910s asserted the necessity for creating new settings that were hospitable to the female artist; such space was characterised by refiguring both domestic aesthetics and the social and familial make-up of the home. Vanessa's challenging of conventional domestic values also questioned inherited ideas about what the family was made of and how it functioned. At this time, Virginia was still more tentative than her sister in her attempts to reconceptualise domestic aesthetics and kinship, although the Charleston radicalism informs and serves as a backdrop for the conversation on related themes in her 'exercise in the conventional style'.[107] In *Night and Day*, these familial and social concerns are often given a powerfully visual frame, which emphasises the debate's links to Vanessa, who was continuing her work of decluttering their inherited traditions.

Night and Day demonstrates one of fiction's auto/biographical functions—its fictionality enables speculation about 'what might have been' and so emphasises aspects of the biographical narrative that was.[108] In Katharine, Virginia places her sister into an alternative past: the character shares Vanessa's aesthetic and professional drives, but there seems to be no way for her to access a room of her own, or a domestic and familial arrangement which would support her personal aspirations. The only peer connection she finds possible to prioritise is her relationship with Ralph, with whom her distance to the likes of Mary becomes unbridgeable, and although the novel affords some hope to Ralph and Katharine's relationship being new in some ways, it seems unlikely that Katharine will

[107] *Letters*, IV, p.231.
[108] Laura Marcus, p.280.

occupy a room of her own—the importance of which was a point of absolute agreement for the Stephen sisters.

WORDLESSNESS

It is impossible, then, for Katharine to hold on to alternatives to a kinship defined by the heteropatriarchal Oedipal structures. This is because she finds it impossible to occupy a sisterly space—a space that would enable and prioritise female creativity and independence and validate horizontal relations and communications between women. There are glimpses of possibility for such spaces in *Night and Day*, but ultimately they fail to materialise and accommodate the women of the novel; Mrs Hilbery's rooms are defined by the paternal object of her fruitless work, and even in the suffragist office life is marshalled by an entitled man.[109] In fact, the closest the novel comes to creating sisterly space is in the few short private moments between Katharine and Mary in Mary's apartment, and during the descriptions of the even more private dreamscape of Katharine's daydreams, the only frames in which she is not defined in relation to a man or by a vertically imposing force.

Ann-Marie Priest calls Katharine's dream-world 'that potentially feminine space', but as she points out, by the novel's conclusion, it is 're-appropriated by patriarchy when it is linked and subsumed into Ralph's fantasy world'.[110] Therefore it remains just a potential space, verily a no-place—which we might liken to Irigaray's '"elsewhere"', where 'something of woman's language', as opposed to patriarchal language, could possibly emerge.[111] Like Mary and Katharine's comings-together, Katharine's dream-world is characterised by silence and unspeakability. Early on, we are introduced to Katharine's disbelief in language and literature, to 'the confusion, agitation, and vagueness' of which she prefers 'the exactitude, the star-like impersonality, of figures' or mathematics (40). Words, as a system of representation, fail to render Katharine's private fancies: 'her romance wasn't *that* romance. It was a desire, an echo, a sound; she could drape it in colour, see it in form, hear it in music, but not in words; no, never in words.' (303) Where words fail, the implication is, alternative visual or other abstract forms of representation might succeed, and indeed Katharine uses images and landscapes in her later attempts to communicate her private world to Ralph. But forcing her visions into words such as "a mountain in the North of

[109] Mr Clacton assumes there will be a time 'when it would become necessary to tell [Mary] that there could not be two masters in one office' and believes that her expertise originates from the 'group of very clever young men' she knows (280).
[110] Priest, pp.79—80.
[111] Irigaray, 'Questions', p.158.

England" immediately requires its own negation—"It's not a mountain in the North of England"—thus emphasising the impossibility of expressing her experience in words (447—8).

Such unattainability is also evoked in the novel's very first words – though presumably written as the very last – its dedication. *Night and Day* opens with a dedication:

> TO
> VANESSA BELL
> BUT, LOOKING FOR A PHRASE,
> I FOUND NONE TO STAND
> BESIDE YOUR NAME

Lee identifies the tone as 'tender, courtly', and indeed besides evoking the desperately unrequited state of courtly love, the dedication appeals to the related traditions of idealisation of the love-object and the inability of words to portray her beauty and goodness.[112] As a matter of fact, there was a particular phrase Virginia wanted to present beside her sister's name: 'and to Duncan Grant'. But Duncan felt uncomfortable with such a public declaration of his connection to Vanessa, and, as Dunn writes, he 'requested that Virginia should not add his name, even in script, besides Vanessa's in her printed dedication'.[113] Thus, the relationship to which Vanessa had recently become dedicated turns out to be somewhat unviable and inapplicable publicly, and so parallels the novel's failures in discovering comprehensively functioning alternatives to normative kinship.

The dedication can also be read as a commentary on the novel as a portrait of Vanessa and as Virginia's conclusive realisation of how very inconclusive her verbal portrait, although hundreds of pages long, inevitably remained. In the beginning of *Night and Day*, Virginia was 'very much interested in [Vanessa's] life, which I think of writing another novel about' and emphasised the proliferation of ideas her sister inspired: 'Its fatal staying with you—you start so many new ideas.'[114] Even when she was close to finishing this 'another novel', she recalled seeing Vanessa recently – 'I still remember the features of Mrs Dolphin' – and felt the familiar, insatiable urge yet again: 'O dear; I must write a story about it.'[115] *Night and Day* searches in vain for phrases that would sufficiently describe and capture Katharine or Vanessa, or possess the scope required to 'stand beside [her] name'.

[112] Lee, p.435.
[113] Dunn, p.201.
[114] *Letters*, II, p.109.
[115] *Letters*, II, p.370.

All the major characters attempt to sum up Katharine's character; she typically eludes these deductions, and her strongest self-characterisations are formulated either through negation – "I'm not what you all take me for. I'm not domestic, or very practical or sensible, really" (203) – or generalisation— "I'm a [...] rather ordinary character." (404)

This vagueness or broadness becomes even more prominent in Virginia's next novel, *Jacob's Room*, where readers associate the eponymous character 'with many different kinds of men', as Jocelyn Rodal observes, and, notably, 'we cannot seem to choose which man he is.'[116] Interestingly, the novel Virginia composed around her dead brother Thoby announced repeatedly that '[i]t is no use trying to sum people up', hinting at the futility of her many attempts of depicting her living sister in the many guises she made up, most recently and extensively Katharine.[117] As *Jacob's Room* demonstrates the pointlessness of summing up Jacob Flanders in his multitudiousness, the dedication in *Night and Day* submits to the nonexistence of a phrase that would capture 'VANESSA BELL'; the wordlessness that is implied to follow this surrender permits vagueness or generality but also endless variety, which would be impossible within inevitably finite verbal portraits.

WORLDLESSNESS

Katharine's utopia or no-place, where she finds herself during her trances, is marked by such inexpressibility and indeterminateness. The images that describe her no-place are numerous and generated effortlessly: '[e]asily, and without correction by reason, her imagination made pictures, superb backgrounds' (107). She imagines herself 'by the shore of the sea', riding 'through forests', galloping 'by the rim of the sea', or 'walking down a road in Northumberland in the August sunset', on 'the top of a high hill', but also excursing 'into the dark of the air, or settled upon the surface of the sea', 'beneath the stars of midnight' and visiting 'the snow valleys of the moon' (107—8, 460—1). Indeed, the "[i]mpossible" "mountain in the North of England" is just one of the possible images she could have tried to fix. '[T]he ridiculous notion of putting any part of this into words' makes her laugh— reducing 'her vision to words' is impossible because of the fundamentally nebulous nature of her no-place: 'it was no single shape coloured upon the dark, but rather a general

[116] Jocelyn Rodal, 'Patterned Ambiguities: Virginia Woolf, Mathematical Variables, and Form', *Configurations*, 1 (2018), p.86.
[117] Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, ed. by Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.37.

excitement, an atmosphere, which, when she tried to visualize it, took form as a wind scouring the flanks of northern hills and flashing light upon cornfields and pools' (447).[118]

This no-place is – like fiction – the repository of possibility: 'There dwelt the things one might have felt, had there been cause', and this potential, though never realised, produces 'an infinite variety of thoughts that were too foolish to be named' (145, 460). The number of possible variations of the no-place is infinite but it has two constant qualities: '[i]t was a place where feelings were liberated from the constraint which the real world puts upon them; and the process of awakenment was always marked by resignation' (145). The indefiniteness of the magnanimous hero that occasionally appears in Katharine's dreams – he is repeatedly described as 'some magnanimous hero' (108, 145) – is also indicative of the general nature of the no-place; indeed, this hero is the exact opposite of Ralph's fantasies of Katharine: 'She met no acquaintance there, as Denham did, miraculously transfigured.' (145) Contrastingly, Katharine is alone and independent, but adventurous: as Priest observes, '[h]er desire for liberation encompasses, but also goes beyond, fantasies of a more active life than the one allowed her as a woman'.[119]

Initially, Katharine's trances are underpinned by her desire for and feeling of profound separation from her social world—she turns inwards into her isolation much like the woman in Vanessa's *The Tub*. Mary Ann Caws's reading of the painting describes its atmosphere in ways that resonate with my impressions of Katharine's dream-world. Caws suggests that we tend to 'over-read pain and withdrawal in this mesmerizing picture', when we could see it as a representation of interior joy or of a 'self as opened to itself.'[120] Caws' precise analysis of the relations of the colours in *The Tub* – she notes that all the different tones are echoed somewhere in the picture, working 'towards a surprising harmony' – draws our attention to connections between the colours and shapes that respond to one another, 'counter[ing] the presumed aloness of the subject.'[121] Additionally, the formal properties of the picture connect it to Vanessa's 'seemingly extraverted' *Conversation* (1913), as Caws notes, further prompting a reading of *The Tub* as a depiction of connections, in spite of, and simultaneously to, its introversion. Katharine and the subject of *The Tub* being

[118] I agree with Annika Lindskog's assertion that these vague images 'are emblematic of [Katharine's] emotions and of the atmosphere of her mind and clearly have nothing to do with the external world' (*Silent Modernism: Soundscapes and the Unsayable in Richardson, Joyce, and Woolf* [Lund: Lunds universitet, 2017], p.311). In fact, as Lindskog writes, Katharine's inner world is 'suggestive of expressionist painting, defined by Shulamith Behr as "response to the imperatives of an inner world"' (p.311). These, I would like to add, were of course the imperatives Vanessa and other Bloomsbury artists were reacting to during their purely abstract phase in the mid-1910s.

[119] Priest, p.68.

[120] Mary Ann Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.173, 175.

[121] Caws, p.199.

thus similar – and in many interpretations based on the same woman – Katharine's isolation may be seen as a positive state, although in Ralph her remoteness inspires resentment, but '[t]he fact remained that she had no need of him and was very loath to be reminded of him' (501). Even Mary initially thinks of Katharine as an 'egoist', but feeling no need to destroy her self-containment, she begins to sense 'signs of a soft brooding spirit' and 'an habitual gentleness' in Katharine, hinting that such autonomy could run parallel to and not in opposition to intimacy between women (285).

Priest explores this private world in depth and detail, identifying it as a location for dissolution and arguing that in her desire not to be represented, Katharine uses words like 'nothingness and emptiness' as 'placeholders for something entirely other', trying to reform her identity 'in ways that are not circumscribed by any existing models—particularly those prescribed by patriarchy, whose constructions of femininity she finds so constraining.'[122] In her no-place, Katharine both becomes 'another person' and 'lose[s] herself in the nothingness of night' (144, 106). Priest argues that Katharine 'exists in her own perfection [...] without impediment' 'only in this other realm', demonstrating that Katharine experiences her social identity – and her roles as daughter, grand-daughter, fiancée, woman of the house – as oppressive.[123] Katharine's longing for non-representation is motivated by her wish to escape this oppression and by imagining 'a state of non-identity and by refusing it any name, any description, any of the customary characteristics of identity, she is refusing to allow it to be appropriated by language—and, accordingly, by patriarchal society.'[124]

Priest likewise demonstrates that Katharine experiences herself in a way that 'cannot be represented within existing conceptual frameworks'.[125] This non-existence of suitable means of representation can be read as a presupposition for the previously discussed lack of appropriate language for representing sisterhood—or women's conceptualisations of identities that are not defined by their relationships to a man. Indeed, Katharine's interest in mathematics is an example of my earlier suggestion that in order to discuss their non-patriarchal relationships, women have to borrow from patriarchal discourse because nothing else is available: paradoxically, although mathematics has a public reputation as 'unwomanly'(40), Katharine appropriates it as a "silent, uncoded, feminine cuneiform", to borrow Patricia Ondek Laurence's phrase, in order to privately (not) represent herself.[126] Priest considers this paradox and hints at the infinite possibilities of her mathematics:

[122] Priest, p.66.
[123] Priest, p.67.
[124] Priest, p.68.
[125] Priest, p.69.
[126] Quoted in Priest, p.71.

'Katharine's algebraic squiggles represent her precisely by not representing her. They convey nothing whatever about her—and thus they do not constrain, construct, or delimit her in any way.'[127] Katharine's no-place, therefore, is 'an absence [...] a space of possibilities which cannot be spoken or given any precise shape or form', and, as Priest concludes, this is where Virginia's 'prototype of the alternative, and feminine (as opposed to patriarchal), modes of subjectivity' resides in *Night and Day*—this is also the space with the fleeting sisterly potential.

'STAR-GAZING?'

Outside of Katharine's immaterial internal world, alternative ways of forming a feminine identity and conducting relationships are glimpsed at in a couple of scenes with Katharine and Mary. Hussey, following Jane Marcus's argument that a '"burie[d] signature of female desire and lesbianism"' can be excavated in *Night and Day*, demonstrates in 'Refractions of Desire' that the relationship between Katharine and Mary offers 'Woolf's vision of a life that would escape the conventions both novels [*Night and Day* and Leonard's *Wise Virgins*] seem to deplore.'[128] Hussey considers the question as to whether it can be suggested that 'Mary loves Katharine and that Katharine shares this feeling to a certain extent'.[129] He correctly observes the complex emotional tension between the two women: 'Whenever they are together the atmosphere is highly charged and Katharine frequently seeks Mary's company at moments when the pressure of the pathetic behavior of William and Ralph becomes too much to bear.'[130]

The women's first encounter is particularly interesting. In this scene, standing near a window in Mary's apartment, Katharine and Mary have just agreed to use first names – which was a notable Bloomsbury practice – and Katharine repeats "Mary, then. Mary, Mary, Mary" and 'dr[aws] back the curtain in order, perhaps, to conceal the momentary flush of pleasure which is caused by coming perceptibly nearer to another person' (56). Although the narrator momentarily disengages from authoritative knowledge – 'perhaps' Katharine's reasons were such – there is no doubt about the bodily 'flush of pleasure' Katharine experiences because of the palpable convergence. They both look out of the window then to see a 'hard silver moon', 'little grey-blue clouds', roofs, and 'the empty moonlight pavement [...] upon which the joint of each paving-stone was clearly marked

[127] Priest, p.71.
[128] Hussey, p.141.
[129] Hussey, p.141.
[130] Hussey, p.141.

out' (56). The observed detail of the joined-together, yet distinct, paving-stones hints at the possibility of another concrete connection, as does the next sentence, in which Mary shortly looks up through Katharine's eyes and seems to know what she is thinking: 'Mary then saw Katharine raise her eyes again to the moon, with a contemplative look in them, as though she were setting that moon against the moon of other nights, held in memory.' (56)

The spell of the moment is broken, as someone 'behind them ma[kes] a joke about star-gazing, which destroyed their pleasure in it, and they looked back into the room again' (56—7). The joke which makes the women turn back towards the room – and the men in it, Rodney in particular – is of interest to Hussey, who links the scene to a similar one in *Mrs Dalloway* as 'a descriptive homology that endorses a reading of the scene as referring to love between women', as well as to a drawing by Franz Bayros titled 'Star-Gazer', which shows two women making love.[131] It is worth noting, too, that both Denham and Rodney make their attempt to connect with Katharine through the stars: directly after the moment with Mary, Denham begrudgingly asks Katharine "You know the names of the stars, I suppose?" and she downplays her astronomical mastery – "I know how to find the Pole star if I'm lost" – and then adds, "Nothing interesting ever happens to me", which could be read as a comment on the turn her visit to Mary's has taken (58). A few pages later, Rodney cites Philip Sidney's 'Astrophil and Stella 31' to Katharine, to no great effect: the silence and the moon's 'wan' face recall the interrupted star-gazing moment with Mary, only adding to the melancholy evoked by the poem, which to Rodney might indeed be about proud beauties, but to Virginia would certainly have invoked the tragedy, marriage and death of her half-sister Stella (63). By contrast, the imagery of the women's star-gazing scene is suggestive of generative connections and repetition—Katharine's vision, into which Mary gently dips, sets the moon next to other versions of itself on a comparative timeline, conjuring up a series of circles. Neither of the men can tap into Katharine's celestial visions in this effortless way, and although the moment with Mary is brief and interrupted, it suggests the possibility of the women's duplicating, shared vision, in which seriality is a constitutive form.

WE CAN/NOT TALK

[131] Hussey, p.142. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Sally kisses the young Clarissa, and it is the 'the most exquisite moment of her whole life', but the moment is ruined when Peter intrudes, asking what they are doing: 'Star-gazing?' (p.30).

Henceforth, the women's relationship is characterised by two sensations: attraction, which occasionally manifests physically, and a sense of the impossibility of connection. Repeatedly, Mary is 'baffled by something inscrutable in the character of a person to whom she felt herself much attracted' (181). This contrariness is pressing also in the other scene Hussey refers to as support for his argument about representation of lesbian desire. Hussey observes that '[w]hen Mary lovingly fingers the fur of Katharine's dress, an alternative to the procession of "births, deaths and marriages" that Harry Davis reacts against so vehemently at the close of *The Wise Virgins* is offered.'[132] I agree with Hussey's assertion that this glimpse at the relationship the two women could have, but do not, highlights an alternative to 'coarse sexuality and hidebound conventionality', but I find there are, in addition to the lesbian erotic, other inflections to emphasise here.[133] Firstly, the composition of Mary sitting by Katharine and fingering her skirt is a version of the classic mother and child theme, already encountered in Chapter 2, and the monumentality of Katharine's figure catches Mary's eye and breath: 'Something unfamiliar in the pose of the silent figure, something still, solemn, significant about it, made her hold her breath.' (293) Like Mrs Ramsay, depicted in a similar pose by Lily, Katharine is deeply mysterious and strange and at the same time deeply comforting and familiar.

Besides the physical and visual pleasure taken in the maternal – and erotic – attitude of the other woman, a decided awkwardness precedes this moment of connection. Mary pleads that Katharine stay with her, because she feels 'inarticulately and violently, that she could not bear to let her go' (289). Although Mary's feeling is like the speechless terror of an abandoned whelp, it is exactly her desire to speak to Katharine that makes her cling onto her: 'If Katharine went, her only chance of speaking was lost; her only chance of saying something tremendously important was lost.' But the words get stuck in Mary's throat and she 'flinche[s]' from the thought of 'expos[ing] oneself without reservations to other human beings.' Mary is horrified of losing her loneliness but also the 'imagination of this loneliness frighten[s] her'. Katharine feels equally uncomfortable, finding Mary's sudden openness, and the suffering it reveals, indecent and appalling. Scared of loneliness, Mary shares her secret – that she is in love with Ralph, who is in love with Katharine – hoping that "If I tell you, then we can talk" (291). But the two women do not come to an understanding about Ralph and Mary soon desires 'the old unshared intimacy' (292).

So it turns out that talking to one another, for Mary and Katharine, is a needed and desired action but difficult and disconcerting, possibly because their talk centres on Ralph.

[132] Hussey, p.143.
[133] Hussey, p.143.

But it is through the acute awkwardness of speaking that the women arrive at the conclusion of the scene, which in its intense silence articulates 'something tremendously important' (289). Mary no longer wishes to speak, and she feels simultaneously 'rejected' and 'immensely beloved' (293). Finally, Katharine and Mary share silence after the uneasiness of words:

> Attempt to express these sensations was vain, and, moreover, [Mary] could not help believing that, without any words on her side, they were shared. Thus for some time longer they sat silent, side by side, while Mary fingered the fur on the skirt of the old dress. (293)

Silence and the inadequacy of verbal expression are repeated to an overwhelming effect in the scene, but also other words beginning with *s* stand out: 'shared' and 'side', which is repeated three times in quick succession. This, in my view, highlights the women's silence as a potential space for sharing and furthermore draws attention to their positioning serially, 'side by side'. Mary and Katharine's relationship certainly has its erotic elements and maternal echoes, but most significantly there is potency both in the difficulty of speech and the following alterity of sisterly silence, where she can, when it is shared horizontally, 'los[e] her isolation' (293).

FEMINIST HEAVENLY BODIES

Closely related to silence and isolation, and to mathematics as a form of (non-)self-representation as I have discussed, is of course Katharine's interest in astronomy and the strangeness of space. Michael Whitworth suggests that from *Night and Day* to *The Waves* Woolf uses astronomy to explore 'the conflicting forces of isolation and communication'.[134] This paradoxical doubleness, and astronomy in general in Woolf's fiction, have been extensively researched by Holly Henry, who locates the frightfulness and meaninglessness associated with space in Woolf's contemporary popular culture, in which she identifies, along with Rita Felski, 'a desire for a "loss of self that ha[s] historically been gendered feminine"'.[135] We have already acknowledged Katharine's urge for such dissolution of the self, and by following Jane Goldman's reading of star-glimpsing as a positive and feminist

[134] Michael Whitworth, *Authors in Context: Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.182.
[135] Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.9.

experience in Woolf, I interpret astronomical space as a space alternative to Katharine's patriarchally arranged world and so intimately related to her private no-place.[136]

One of the central star-gazing moments occurs when Katharine briefly steps outside Stogdon House in chapter 16, leaving behind Rodney's compliments and reprovals, to see 'nothing but the stars' (204). The starlight brings to Katharine vivid visions, which are at least in part inspired by popular science, and 'the stars [do] their usual work upon the mind, fr[eezing] to cinders the whole of our short human history', making man appear insignificant and transitory.[137] Katharine's final vision is of empty space, and she imagines herself 'dissolved in silver and spilt over the ledges of the stars forever and ever', whilst simultaneously seeing herself riding with the vague hero. Afterwards, when she turns back towards the house, her vision of the familial building appears altered by the star-light: she is very attentive to colours and the shape of the windows suggest to her an unlikely image of a ship, 'dolphins and narwhals' and old maps (205). In addition to the shapely presence of Vanessa's nickname, her visual world is evoked by the geometric shapes, especially circular ones – 'semicircular' stairs and 'sallow globes' – which Katharine now notices around the house. Henry argues that the globe becomes a key image for Virginia, too: through her method of orthographic mapping, the 'image of earth's globe became a productive metaphor for her own modernist art', and Virginia's persistent use of the image reveals the globe as a 'touchstone for celebrating alterity and a multiplicity of perspectives.'[138] Katharine's imagination of 'a portly three-decker' and 'old maps' and the adventurousness it suggests may be linked to globular visions of alterity and multiplicity, traceable in the work of both sisters (205). Furthermore, Katharine's warship and 'old maps' may be read as another instance of a traditionally masculine discourse appropriated for feminine self-expression; and the modest, personal evocation of Vanessa's nickname – in the plural too – to adorn the imagined maps invokes not a lonely journey of discovery, but a ship accompanied by a multitude of sympathetic creatures, if only Katharine can hold onto her starry visions of alterity.

Examining Virginia's diary account of the 1927 solar eclipse, Goldman does not associate space with loneliness and isolation, but rather, as Henry also notes, a strong "sense of shared experience" "comes across most powerfully in her description."[139] A feminist view of space might, then, depend on a shared experience, as Katharine and Mary's moment of star-gazing hints. In addition to this, as Goldman's treatment of Katharine's astronomical

[136] Goldman (2001), p.92.
[137] Henry's reading of the passage may be of interest, p.135.
[138] Henry, p.72.
[139] Henry, p.24; Goldman (2001), p.29.

activities suggests, such space is chartable and connected: undermining the conventional association of light with masculinity and dark with femininity, Goldman observes Katharine:

> During the conventionally chaotic darkness of night she pursues (traditionally 'unwomanly') rationality and precision, which are further reclaimed as feminine provinces by the invocation of the planets—not as literary, amatory, mystic forces, but as mathematically chartable points of reference in the night sky.[140]

In particular, Goldman traces Katharine's subversive 'joy in things rational' in the scene of Denham's proposal to her.[141] Katharine's happiness arises from the 'algebraic symbols, pages all specked with dots and dashes and twisted bars' that come 'before her eyes' and as Denham proposes, 'all the time she was in fancy looking up through a telescope at white shadow-cleft disks which were other worlds' (317). Remarkably, both the algebra and astronomical bodies are depicted in strongly visual vocabulary, emphasising a likeness to Vanessa's abstract decorative work. As Goldman writes, the passage 'celebrates the sun-free night sky for its liberating and rational potential for women', showing 'the "dark country" of feminine experience to be luminous, rational, and chartable.'[142] The scene next records a crucial split in Katharine: 'she felt herself possessed of two bodies, one walking by the river with Denham, the other concentrated to a silver globe aloft in the fine blue space above the scum of vapours that was covering the visible world' (317). Indeed, what Katharine needs is two bodies: one to attach itself to a public existence in the patriarchal social world and another to keep her 'aloft' in her private world and creative work. The need for a sacrificial female body inevitably calls to mind the sisters elsewhere in the novel who enable their siblings' creative freedom. Since there is only one body of Katharine, though, this scene of luminous space adventure, like others, ends with a return to earth, because 'she was still bound to earth by a million fibres' (317).

THE POTENTIAL OF *X*

Katharine's need to copy herself brings us back to Mitchell's seriality as well as to the traditional trope of the double in representations of sisters. Both of these terms, seriality

[140] Goldman (2001), p.93.
[141] Goldman (2001), p.93.
[142] Goldman (2001), p.93.

and the double, are numerical or mathematical in the most basic sense, and as we have already seen, mathematics is Katharine's chosen discourse for (not) representing herself. Jocelyn Rodal, who has written on mathematics in Woolf's work, might offer another useful concept, namely variables. In 'Patterned Ambiguities: Virginia Woolf, Mathematical Variables, and Form', Rodal identifies Woolf's central symbols sharing 'the semantic properties of mathematical variables': these are 'markers that are designed to flexibly denote multifarious, undetermined meanings'.[143] Rodal explains that the function of a variable is to mark 'that which we refuse to determine' and therefore offer 'many meaningful possibilities' and generality which signals 'multiplicity: the capacity for one word or phrase to describe many different things.'[144] Variables and their endless indeterminateness are at the heart of the realisation that 'it is no use trying to sum people up', discussed above. The most crucial attribute we associate with Katharine is her liability to change – that is, variability – as she never seems to fix one role, identity, or even a world. The answer to the question of who Katharine Hilbery is, or what she is like, depends, so to speak, on the values accompanying the variable x in any equation—in another equation she would have been something else and endlessly so. Especially considering this capacious potentiality, it feels regrettable that she becomes fixed in the conventional equation of marriage, the result of which is already known to tradition. Despite the novel's ending which conforms to the romance plot, there is space to imagine equations where the values are denoted by 'dolphins and narwhals' and 'sallow globes' such as the moon set 'against the moon of other nights' (205, 56).

Finally, what such a mathematical tool inspires is the realisation of the fundamentality of relationality: the 'who's and 'what's of being and identity depend on who and what x is related to. Rodal highlights a scene from *To the Lighthouse*, which demonstrates this insight: as Lily considers her painting, she feels that "if there, in that corner it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness"; as Rodal writes, 'the terms "bright" and "darkness" could almost be "x" and "not x," insofar as their relation and opposition to each other seems to be of greater importance than the meanings of those particular terms.'[145] To justify this prioritising of the relation between 'x' and 'not x' before their particular individual meanings, Rodal cites mathematician Henri Poincaré: '"Mathematicians study not objects, but relations between objects"'.[146] Virginia was reaching a similar conclusion and shifting her perspective accordingly as she was completing *Night and Day*, which had taken her through the blurred boundaries in relational

[143] Rodal, p.73.
[144] Rodal, p.74.
[145] *To the Lighthouse*, p.45; Rodal, pp.96—97.
[146] Quoted in Rodal, p.97.

writing and accented the generative potential of denying limits in portraying her sister. Her next novel, also a portrait of a sibling, drove home the impossibility of studying people as fixed objects—even when the life in question had ended. Her impulse to write about Vanessa never left her, but it was implicated differently in her future work—aspects of her would people *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *The Years*, which arguably study 'not objects, but relations between objects'. *Night and Day* is an extensive and expansive attempt to portray Vanessa and although it motions towards the inevitable unfixedness of all portraiture and forms of kinship, the novel ends feeling uncomfortable about the awareness that Virginia, finding no 'PHRASE' 'TO STAND BESIDE YOUR NAME', should have let her sister be represented by a single letter, an *x*.

This chapter has thrown light on the blurry boundaries between fact and fiction, and life and art, when sistering is performed by a conscious fictional representation of the creator's sister. We have discovered Katharine's isolation to be valuable to Vanessa's representation in this fictional guise; as the novel's dedication implies, Virginia's project of textual sistering was beginning to entertain the possibility of an unfixed imaginary. *Night and Day* locates Vanessa at the centre of Virginia's evolving reconfigurations of kinship, and although the novel does not yet escape the heteropatriarchal marriage plot, its imaginative investment in the sister figure and the woman on her own signals the increasingly serious demand for a mode of representation that could represent the sororal subject and is therefore alternative and lateral. Perhaps with such a vocabulary or imaginary of the other, kinship would not only 'sustain human intelligibility', as Butler fears always-already-heterosexual kinship to do, but it could positively make it new.[147]

[147] Butler (2002), p.16.

CHAPTER 4. *FLUSH* AND SIGNIFICANT SORORAL OTHERNESS

This chapter leaps on to 1933, to Virginia's *Flush: A Biography*, and explores its connection to Vanessa. I approach the book from a perspective briefly suggested by Lee and Dunn—as a love-letter from a devoted sister. Dunn calls *Flush* a 'peculiarly sympathetic biography' and asserts that in it, 'Virginia expressed something of the devotional nature of her love for Vanessa.'[1] This claim is echoed by Lee: she acknowledges the novel's place among the recastings of Vanessa, writing that '[i]n *Flush* [Virginia] parodied her own devotion to Vanessa in the guise of the spaniel adoring his mistress.'[2] Indeed, the two main characters, the cocker spaniel Flush and his mistress Elizabeth Barrett Browning share characteristics with each of the Stephen sisters. Following the trail set forth by the two biographers, I explore how recognising *Flush* as a verbalisation of Virginia's devotion to her sister may affect our reading of the book, but I also propose that rather than merely parodying adoring devotion, *Flush* offers us a way into Virginia's matured conceptions of kinship and sororal affinity. As we will see, at the level of plot and emotion, *Flush* returns to the primary crisis of losing the fellow conspirator to a male outsider, and as such, is a rewriting of the kinship disruption discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Therefore, I begin by establishing the association that existed between dogs and Vanessa in general and the relevant biographical analogies.

In order to discuss Virginia's evolving treatment of Mitchell's law of the mother – that is, accommodating difference within sameness – this chapter treats human-animal relations as kin relations. By doing this, I take a stand like that of Marc Shell, who argues that pets, despite their species difference, are exceptional in the way that they are they are figured as 'familial kin', or a part of the family.[3] I believe that Virginia was genuinely interested in what Dan Wylie calls "the actuality of an animal's consciousness" and that this interest is matched by her maturing fascination with the particularity of the other in her kin relations, including her relationship with her sister, her closest stranger.[4] *Flush* is part of a wider network of relational living: Karalyn Kendall-Morwick proposes that it should be read as an ingredient in Woolf's affirmation that dogs have a place 'in the network of relations that shapes "the unseen part of us"'.[5] It is possible to read animal motifs 'as

[1] Dunn, p.5.
[2] Lee, p.118.
[3] 'pet love is [...] extendable to a brotherly (or, if you will, sisterly) love of all animals universally—to a *kinship with all life*. [...] all family pets [...] are part of a superhuman kind of family.' Marc Shell, 'The Family Pet,' *Representations*, 15 (1986), p.126.
[4] Quoted in Derek Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p.135.
[5] Karalyn Kendall-Morwick, 'Mongrel Fiction: Canine Bildung and the Feminist Critique of Anthropocentricism in Woolf's *Flush*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (2014), p.524.

examples of the human imagining-itself-other', or as a vision of 'unimpeded movement' 'in the strange imaginative spaces of the animal', and I maintain that *Flush* is committed both to otherness and movement among and across the human and non-human categories.[6] Virginia's imagining of the animal other is often matched by her conceptualising of visual – likewise wordless – existence, and unsurprisingly, the book, imbued with visual detail and description, is closely related to Virginia's other contemporary writings about painting, which often pivot on the simultaneous oddness and kinship she experienced facing Vanessa's work.[7] The strangeness of this otherness is specifically represented in the four line drawings Vanessa made for *Flush*, which I discuss at the end of the chapter.

Many recent critical approaches to *Flush* draw from Donna Haraway's companion species theory, and I, too, benefit from her thinking on significant otherness. The focus of this thesis, the sister relationship, is undeniably anthropocentric, but I hope I can also hint towards a fruitful understanding of cross-species kinship as I examine the correlations between companion species and aspects of siblingship. Haraway characterises dogs' relationship with humans as 'obligatory, constitutive, historical, [and] protean', and boldly argues that the relationship is 'not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play.'[8] I trust that at this point in my thesis this resonates with much of the past discussion and will continue to frame this chapter. Companion species, according to Haraway, are '*bound in telling story upon story with nothing but the facts*', and I propose that *Flush*, a text of that very Woolfian, paradoxical category of a story of facts, or 'a story about relationality and companion species', to borrow Caroline Hovanec's phrase, opens up new ways to think about kinship, companionship, coevolution and the imaginative space in which two different beings become entangled.[9] By paralleling my study of kinship with terms and analyses from animal studies, I hope to demonstrate *Flush*'s wide-ranging exploration of both interpersonal and interspecies relationships as well as its fascination with diversity and plurality, by suggesting that the significant otherness of the canine perspective blossoms 'as something other than a reflection of one's intentions', as Haraway writes, or, as something that 'goes

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[6] Steve Baker, [excerpt from] 'The Postmodern Animal', in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, ed. by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp.278—288 (285).
[7] For more visual culture in *Flush* see Maggie Humm, 'Chapter 11. Virginia Woolf and Visual Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Sellers, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.214—230.
[8] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p.12.
[9] Haraway (2003), p.2; Caroline Hovanec, 'Philosophical Barnacles and Empiricist Dogs: Knowing Animals in Modernist Literature and Science', *Configurations*, 3 (2013), p.266.

on saying something of its own'—like Vanessa's painting, the strangeness of which was gradually becoming more tolerable to its sister.[10]

'OUR PLAY PRIVATE LIFE'

Dogs started being a part of the large Stephen family after Gerald brought the terrier Shag to their summer residence at St. Ives in July 1892. Gerald wanted Shag to become a rat-catcher, but when the dog lacked a sufficiently serious attitude towards the job, he was downgraded from Gerald's to 'Vanessa's dog'.[11] Virginia's early imaginings of her sister as maternal extended to dogs, too: in 'Reminiscences', she recalls 'days of pure enjoyment', 'when your mother trotted about on various businesses, considering the characters and desires of dogs very gravely'.[12] Clearly, Shag and the dogs that followed him were in some ways pictured as part of the family. A more complete account of the dogs that accompanied Virginia throughout her life is offered by Maureen Adams' *Shaggy Muses*. She also helpfully proposes that dogs provided both tangible and abstract links between Virginia and the people she wished to entice. Considering the effects of 'The Trial of the Big Dog' on the nine-year-old Virginia, Adams suggests that the event, which granted Virginia her mother's undivided attention for several hours, deeply impressed her and 'can be seen as the first time a dog helped Virginia bring someone close to her'; afterwards, 'she would use dogs to attract the attention of, and to express her feelings for, the people she loved.'[13] The first of these people after Julia, and in particular after her death, was Vanessa.

Besides such connection-making between people, aspects of the dogs' role during Virginia's adolescence can be interpreted via Haraway's account of the companion species. Haraway propounds that play and bringing joy are central to the 'meaning of companion species', and indeed dogs provided Virginia with both companionship and moments of play and joy, which were associated with Vanessa.[14] The younger and sickly adolescent Virginia was often homebound, whereas Vanessa was granted more mobility which she used to attend art classes, much to her sister's envy. When Vanessa was out, Virginia depended on Shag and a new puppy, Jerry, for companionship, but walking the dogs also 'gave the sisters time alone and allowed them to act like children together', as Adams observes.[15]

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[10] Haraway (2003), p.28; Virginia Woolf, 'Foreword' to *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell* (London: London Artists' Association, 1930), [p.3].
[11] Maureen Adams, *Shaggy Muses* (New York: Pallantine Books, 2007), p.200.
[12] 'Reminiscences', p.4.
[13] Adams, p.197.
[14] Haraway (2003), p.38.
[15] Adams, p.203.

Entertainment and excitement were provided by smuggling the unmuzzled Jerry under Vanessa's coat if the sisters spotted a police officer and by organising search parties when either of the dogs escaped. Such 'high drama' and private playful moments temporarily diffused the gloom at Hyde Park Gate and are written about with great zest in Virginia's early diaries.[16]

The first two prominent dogs in Virginia's life, Shag and Gurth, were in fact Vanessa's dogs, which established the lasting connection Virginia would make with dogs and her sister. After the Stephen siblings moved to Gordon Square, Gurth became Virginia's constant, and occasionally misbehaving, companion, as she began to street-haunt London, and over time she grew used to the sheepdog's eye-stalk and began to appreciate his protectiveness. Adams divines that Gurth's constant attention to Virginia 'may have filled some of [her] need for maternal affection'.[17] Virginia lost Gurth's continual company simultaneously with Vanessa's: when Vanessa married, the Bells kept the dog, and although Virginia continued to see both her sister and the dog often, the loss was a blow. Around this time, Virginia began to use dog imagery in her letters to Vanessa, calling her a sheepdog and insisting that her sister's 'handwriting has the quality of a great sheep dogs paw—a sheep dog which has been trotting sagaciously through the mud after its lambs all day long'.[18] These letters signal a strong association between the imagined sheepdog Vanessa, the real sheepdog Gurth and a sheepdog's maternal protection of its flock. Indeed, the image of the sheepdog became a lasting one in Virginia's letters, paying tribute not only to Gurth, but also to her first imaginations of her sister as a dog.

The dog who provided a realistic example for Flush's figure was Virginia's cocker spaniel Pinka (aka Pinker). However, she had approached dog-minds with her writer's sensibility long before Pinka, as her diary entries show. Adams proposes a link between Gurth and their long London walks and the description of the 'whole battery of a London street on a hot summer's day assault[ing] [Flush's] nostrils'.[19] Likewise, the character of Tinker fascinated Virginia: she found him a dog of a 'great' spirit and, like Flush, to have 'even an excessive appreciation of human emotions'(10): 'He is a human dog, aloof from other dogs.'[20] Nonetheless, it was Pinka who lent her face to Woolf's figuration of Flush: her photograph appeared on the title page of the first edition.

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[16] Adams, p.204.
[17] Adams, p.212.
[18] *Letters*, II, p.298.
[19] Adams, p.210; Virginia Woolf, *Flush: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 2002), p.28. Further references will appear in the body text.
[20] *Diary*, I, p.60.

This – alongside the other illustrations in *Flush* – draws one's attention to the importance of Flush's visualisation for Virginia, who, as Humm writes, 'first conceived of Flush as a visual figure': reading the Browning love-letters, she was struck with 'the figure of their dog', which 'made me laugh so I couldn't resist making him a Life.'[21]

Of Virginia's loved ones Pinka is of course most directly connected to Vita Sackville-West, who had given the puppy to her lover in 1926. This link has understandably prompted queer readings of *Flush*,[22] but these interpretations often tend to ignore the fact that while Vita is undeniably the subject of *Orlando*, by the time Virginia was writing her second mock biography, their affair had cooled down into an amicable penpalship years before. Virginia's observations of her model Pinka also suggest connections to another woman besides Vita—Vanessa. When Pinka had five pups (she sat on the sixth one, which Virginia thought was 'convenient'), her mistress reacted adversely to the dog's display of what Virginia qualified as maternal behaviour: 'she is a model of all the maternal vices—absorbed, devoted, zealous, cowish'.[23] Especially after Julian's birth, Virginia had been dubious about Vanessa's absorption in her motherhood, and her ambivalent feelings about motherhood often resurfaced. As she had done with Pinka, she felt 'irritated' with Vanessa's maternal devotion: according to her, the 'religion & superstition of motherhood' made Vanessa 'cold', which in turn evoked 'discreditable' feelings in Virginia as well as the declaration that '[m]ost of all I hate the hush & mystery of motherhood'.[24] Like the 'cowish' Pinka, Vanessa was likened to a farm animal by her sister: sensing possible criticism of her son, she would, in Virginia's words, 'ruffl[e] like a formidable hen'.[25] Alongside motherhood, Virginia associated Pinka with freely-practiced sexuality—as she did Vanessa, who, though hardly promiscuous, had relationships with three other central members of the Bloomsbury Group. Pinka's shameless sexual exploits amused Virginia and she delighted in Pinka's public indecency much like she and Vanessa had been excited by Shag's tendency to pick up fights with other dogs. Dogs could publicly perform acts denied to humans by social convention; as she poetically wrote to her nephew, '[b]eauty shines on two dogs doing what two women must not do'—make love, or war, in public.[26]

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[21] Humm (2010), p.224; *Letters*, V, p.162.
[22] For example Ruth Vanita, '"Love Unspeakable": The Uses of Allusion in *Flush*', in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations*, pp.248—57.
[23] *Letters*, IV, p.176; *Letters*, III, p.529.
[24] *Diary*, IV, p.264.
[25] *Diary*, IV, p.264.
[26] *Letters*, IV, p.34.

Dogged promiscuity aside, Pinka's most important contribution to Virginia's life was reflected upon shortly after the spaniel's death in 1935: in her diary she mourns the dog who had been a part of her daily routines and relations that shape the unseen part of life. Alluding to the dog's signifying power, Virginia writes that '8 years of a dog certainly mean something'.[27] Her thoughts foreshadow Haraway, who would argue that being in contact with dogs makes coevolution possible; if we can inhabit 'the whole legacy' that is shared, very physically, by dogs and humans, 'without the pose of innocence, we might hope for the creative grace of play.'[28] The final scene in Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto* depicts two dogs in a game that makes '*a mockery of reproductive heterosexual hegemony*', as do Woolf's 'two dogs doing what two women must not do'.[29] Virginia's humorous and cheeky tone throughout her writings about dogs in letters, diaries and elsewhere, evidence her joyful picturing of dogs 'without the pose of innocence', and her homage to the dead Pinka, along with her life-long association of dogs with pleasure and fun, hopes, like Haraway, 'for the creative grace of play.' Pinka, now lost, had been 'something of our play private life'—the shared, yet private part of life she had already chased in childhood, pursuing the runaways Shag, Jerry, and Vanessa.[30]

LOVE-LETTER LANGUAGE

The connections between Vanessa and dogs – and other animals – in Virginia's imaginary is nowhere as clear as in her letters, which, like *Flush*, use animal tropes to express grievous and deep-cutting emotions. My reading of *Flush* as a love-letter from a devoted sister aims to take such epistolary animals seriously. Seeing *Flush* as a love-letter is obviously inspired by Nigel Nicolson's description of *Orlando* as 'the longest and most charming love letter in literature'.[31] *Flush* – only about 150 pages – might not be the longest, but it may be the most charming of Virginia's books: it was her most sold novel during her lifetime, and, to the author's dismay, often called exactly that—"charming".[32] Although *Flush* is a funny book, Virginia was worried about it being labelled lady-like or silly, and, like its genre-sister *Orlando*, it has its serious and deeply personal aspects. *Flush* does, as Lee proposes, 'parod[y] her own devotion to Vanessa in the guise of the spaniel', but there are also

[27] *Diary*, IV, p.318.
[28] Haraway (2003), p.98.
[29] Haraway (2003), p.100.
[30] *Diary*, IV, p.318.
[31] Quoted in Merry Pawlowski, 'Introduction' to *Orlando*, pp.v—xx (viii).
[32] *Diary*, IV, p.181.

moments of emotional earnestness, which complicate the joke or parody label.[33] Although tongue-in-cheek, *Flush* is also an articulation of love which Virginia had been verbalising for years through similar tropes and verbal links in her actual love-letters to Vanessa.

The origins of Virginia's Flush, are, of course, in her reading of love-letters – those of the Brownings. The love-affair between Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning ignited during their year-long correspondence, which Flush observes with an outsider's terror: as Elizabeth takes Robert's letter in hand, Flush is 'loosed and forgotten' (49). Elizabeth reads her letters with a lover's abandonment, which Flush finds alarming, imagining a distant warning of fire or 'a burglar, rattling the door' (49). Virginia's letters to her loved ones, men and women, were a significant aspect of how she, too, practiced intimacy, and had one characteristic in common: they were written in a code of animal images. Adams, Vanita and others have noted the fact that Virginia and Vita explored and expressed their sexual and romantic emotions through such images and dogs in particular, but before Vita, Virginia had shared this animal language with Leonard and Violet Dickinson, and, even before them, with Vanessa. In the same register as her above-quoted contestation that Vanessa is like a motherly sheepdog, the sisters' – familiarly nicknamed 'Goat' and 'Dolphin' – correspondence is peopled by dogs and other animals, especially in moments of pleading and endearment.

But why use animals as the central image in her 'little language such as lovers use'?[34] There is more to Virginia's imaginary animals than cuteness: they get sick and angry, they mope, lose hair and have skin problems. Since *Flush* issues from the same vein as Virginia's consistently-used personal menagerie of animal pet names and fantasies, which functioned as a safe shorthand for feelings, Flush and his honest, tangible emotional experiences may provide some answers. The widest gulf between Elizabeth and Flush is created by the fact that they are of different species: 'She was woman; he was dog.' (24) Vanita calls this Flush's 'existential problem': being of different species, he cannot be everything she needs.[35] 'By virtue of his biological existence, he is excluded from the intimacy he desires,' Vanita writes aptly, identifying a metaphor for the socially created gap between members of the same gender.[36] For all his nobility of feeling and determination to face his rival in a duel, Flush is no match for a human man, and rather embarrassingly, '[n]either he nor Miss Barrett seem[s] to think the attack worthy of attention,' Elizabeth only chiding him afterwards (61). Here we may recall Virginia's joke of the two dogs—even

[33] Lee, p.118.
[34] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.199.
[35] Vanita, p.254.
[36] Vanita, p.254.

in private, women may not engage in this public activity of dogs: Flush's physiological existence debars him from the love he desires and believes he is fated for. A dog who 'must love' a human 'forever' was an expressive, and yet safely distant, metaphor for Virginia's consideration of romantic feelings deemed inappropriate (67).

Besides evidencing a secret erotic life, animal language is also used to camouflage and enable brutishness. Examining the use of animals in the writings of the Bloomsbury Group, Wendy Faris proposes that Virginia's description of her half-brother George as pig-like in '22 Hyde Park Gate' simultaneously reveals and disguises his odious and obtuse behaviour towards the sisters; as a contrast, Vanessa figures in the same passage wearing a butterfly.[37] What is more, in her letters, Virginia repeatedly calls her troops of animals 'beasts' or 'brutes', noting the threat of their potentially unsophisticated and anomalous behaviour—and Vanessa uses the same imagery. The threat of misbehaviour is especially presiding in both sisters' frequent depictions of Virginia as an Ape, or Apes, with expectations of naughtiness and Vanessa's attempts to bribe the unruly apes into behaving better: 'Tell the Apes to be good if they want a petting when they get back. I think they're getting out of hand.'[38] At times the mischievousness associated with the Apes is directly related to breaking social norms, such as in this dream of Vanessa's:

> You put me in such a predicament in my dreams last night. You asked Lytton & Pernel & the two young [illegible] to stay with <u>us</u> for 2 nights. I had only 2 beds & 2 rooms to divide between them. [...] I was only overcome by the horror of having to ask Lytton to sleep with [his sister] Pernel! Wasn't it typical of you? How are the Apes?[39]

Vanessa evidently experiences Virginia as exigent and defying the boundaries of socially acceptable familial behaviours, even to the point of necessitating inappropriate intimacy between siblings. Investigating the demanding, chaotic menagerie in Virginia's letters, Lee, too, suggests that besides being fun, the animals gave leeway for 'aberrant behaviour' and making salacious demands, which in human register would have seemed absurd.[40] Indeed,

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[37] Wendy Faris, 'Bloomsbury's Beasts: The Presence of Animals in the Texts and Lives of Bloomsbury', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1 (2007), p.112.
[38] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 26 August 1909.
[39] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 23 August 1909.
[40] Lee, p.111.

Lee finds that 'Virginia's lifelong courtship of Vanessa was licensed by the invention of the pleading, greedy creatures she kept in play all through their correspondence.'[41]

'DEVOTED BEASTS'

Turning to Virginia's epistolary animality towards Vanessa, and the demands and emotions her letters articulated, I will look at a letter written on 6 February 1907 and draw some connections to *Flush*. The letter is most revealing – evidently a love-letter – and written at the eve of the Bells' marriage. It opens with a title in the middle of the page: 'Address of Congratulation / to our / Mistress / on her / Approaching Marriage', which sets the fictional animal register maintained throughout.[42] Vanessa is addressed as 'our Mistress' by those signing the letter: 'Her devoted Beasts / Billy / Bartholomew / Mungo / and / WOMBAT', that is, the three Apes and one of the Stephen children's imaginary familiars. Virginia uses their childhood creations to appeal to Vanessa's emotions. Her own emotions are very conflicted and expressed by her animals as 'our great grief and joy.'

Dunn suggests that Virginia's terror of being abandoned, camouflaged in the letter in her supposedly humorous use of animal images, is reproduced in Flush's moments of 'impotent horror'.[43] Virginia uses a cave symbol to represent Flush's experience: 'What was horrible to Flush [...] was his loneliness. Once he had felt that he and Miss Barrett were together, in a firelit cave. Now the cave was no longer firelit; it was dark and damp; Miss Barrett was outside.' (54) Incidentally, Virginia identifies the beginning of her and Vanessa's conspiracy as the moment of crawling under the nursery-table, when, 'in a gloom happily encircled by the firelight', Vanessa asked her 'whether black cats had tails' (they don't, Virginia confirmed).[44] The safe den of childhood, with a firelit sister creature in it, has a striking resemblance to Flush's cave, in which he and Elizabeth have existed 'alone together' (52). Like Elizabeth, Vanessa was the warm and bright centre of the naïve cave-like existence for young Virginia, whose ontological terror is repeated in *Flush*.

Virginia's rival, Clive, is also assigned an animal role in her 1907 letter: 'We hear that you have found a new Red Ape of a kind not known before who is better than all other apes [i.e. the undersigned] because he can both talk and marry you: from which we are debarred.' The new kind 'not known before', suggests that Clive is, as indeed was the case, the first male suitor whom the sisters took seriously. His colour 'Red' suggests his hair

[41] Lee, p.111.
[42] *Letters*, VI, pp.492—3. For subsequent references to this letter, see this source.
[43] Dunn, p.110.
[44] 'Reminiscences', pp.1—2. See Dunn, p.15.

colour ('his fur [...] red and golden at the tips'), but also associates him with this strongly masculine colour; similarly, Flush associates Robert Browning with red and yellow. This Ape is superior to Virginia's apes because of two qualities: 'he can both talk *and* marry you.' Dunn tempts a connection between the frustration of Virginia's lines and *Flush*.[45] Indeed, Flush, also, is 'debarred' from marrying his beloved; to recall Vanita's phrase, '[b]y virtue of his biological existence,' he is dumb, unlike the new Red Ape, and cannot marry a woman.[46] Virginia's beasts have examined and drawn their confused conclusions of Clive the Ape: he is 'clean, merry' and 'Affectionate', but he is also 'a wasteful eater' and has sharp teeth, which betray Virginia's contemptuous and suspicious attitude towards the new man in her family.

Virginia's 'humble Beasts' go on to explain that since time immemorial they have been devoted to their Mistress. Vanessa has proved herself an ideal mistress 'for any Ape or Wombat whatsoever', her attitude being 'loving and wholesome' and, when appropriate, maternal – tending to fleas – and strict—'scourging of all Misdoings.' The last paragraph of the letter reiterates the story of unrequited love and devotion: for many years the Beasts have 'wooed you' 'in the hope that thus enchanted you would condescend one day to marry us.' Asking Vanessa to 'keep us still for your lovers' and thus accepting a place of lesser importance in their Mistress's life, the Beasts sign off promising their unconditional dog-like adoration to continue 'now as before'. Flush, also, must withdraw his claim of being the primary recipient of Elizabeth's loving attentions, concluding after a thought-process of Hamletian proportions that 'he knew he must love her forever' and therefore has to submit to the new order (67). After all, the 'chain of love' does not break (63). Flush's love for his mistress, though it transforms, endures until the end, as did that of Virginia's: 'I've always been in love with her [Dolphin] since I was a green-eyed brat under the nursery table, and so shall remain in my extreme senility.'[47]

With its explicitly stated romantic (wooing, marrying) and erotic (keeping lovers) wishes, this letter may be deemed even more obtrusive than the sororal eroticism discussed in Chapter 2. How are we to read, and how did Vanessa read, Virginia's letter stating her desire to marry her sister? No direct reply of Vanessa's has survived, if such ever existed, but in a letter dated 13 February 1907, a few days after she probably received Virginia's anomalous letter, 'Maria' continues their correspondence as normal, praising her sister – 'You're a highly talented little beast, & I'm very fond of you' – and asking after the

[45] Dunn, p.110.
[46] Vanita, p.254.
[47] *Letters*, VI, p.153.

imaginary animals: 'How are you? & Wombat?'[48] Unsurprisingly, because of the incest taboo, critics have often been unwilling to openly discuss the explicit erotic feelings Virginia repeatedly voiced in her letters.[49] I am primarily interested in these salacious demands on a textual level, since they undeniably are an aspect of the sisters' relationship: part of Virginia's sistering was making lustful, beastly demands of Vanessa.

This is not to say that Vanessa did not participate in keeping up the sexual undertones of their correspondence. Whilst she probably did not write similarly romantically-animated letters, she wrote to prompt Virginia's adoration of her: 'Write to me soon, Billy. Dont you miss your daily ministrations to me?'[50] Often, she flirtatiously suggested that if Virginia behaved well, she would reward her: 'Perhaps you'll get a kiss for being such a helpful Ape.'[51] Importantly, the sisters' animal menagerie also helped Vanessa to come to terms when *Virginia* married. Initially she found seeing the Woolfs together 'so bewildering & upsetting', but then found her voice through the cheekiness of their animal images, writing to Virginia to '[t]ell Leonard that I very much enjoyed his letter & account of his night with the Ape for which I pity him sincerely. I can well believe it all & would certainly never stand it myself. He ought to try a whip.'[52] The 'Ape' allows the expression of a range of emotions from pity and sympathy to some manner of disgust and maliciousness. Vanessa states that she can well imagine a 'night with the Ape', and as in an earlier letter, also written to Virginia with guidance for Leonard, she demonstrates her prior knowledge of living intimately with the Ape: 'As long as the ape gets all he wants, doesnt smell too much & has his claws well cut, he's a pleasant enough bed-fellow for a short time.'[53] These images are evidently calculated to keep Virginia on her toes, since she is only 'pleasant enough', smelly, and sometimes to be treated like Nietzsche's women, but they are often also the outlet for Vanessa's criticisms of her younger sister's behaviour. In any case, this flirtatious game of animals is one with two participants, a 'Beloved' and an amorous Billygoat.

However seriously we decide to consider these rare birds and odd fish in Virginia's 1907 letter and others, since the author is disguised as three Apes and a WOMBAT, any resulting awkwardness may be avoided by laughing the letter off as a joke, rather like

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[48] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 13 February 1907.
[49] The critics who have noted the erotic are sometimes keen to jump to the conclusion that these letters reflected an actual 'lesbian relationship', which, according to James King, was an eroticisation of the loss of their mother (*Virginia Woolf* [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994], p.79). In my view, this once again evidences two regrettable tendencies: the persistence with which horizontal relationships are forced into a vertical context, and the reluctance to acknowledge the particularity of sibling bonds.
[50] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 9 January 1912.
[51] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 2 January 1919.
[52] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, undated, summer 1912; NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 2 September 1912.
[53] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 19 August 1912.

Robert flicking off the belligerent Flush. Even if Virginia's wish was in earnest, she certainly knew that marrying Vanessa was impossible; nonetheless, the letter and its distancing roles of male-identified pets and a human Mistress allow for a safe expression of a passionate love, which, if ill-received, can be flicked off. *Flush*, although emotionally truthful, wears the guise granted it by being fiction and therefore does not need to be dismissed. Any awkwardness raised by Virginia's animal letters is avoided in *Flush*, to which the reader answers with cherishing sympathy. Flush makes a solemn promise 'to love Mr. Browning and not bite him for the future' 'in his own language'—in a register safe and honest not only for Flush, but for Virginia too (69).

Indeed, although Flush's demands and hopes are impossible, he has the reader's sympathy—as Virginia hoped her correspondent's sympathies would be roused by her pitiful animals. Flush's thoughts during his experience of abandonment and jealousy are narrated in earnest; the tone lacks the ironic distance it adopts at other times. Virginia's fears that the Goat's loving attentions would no longer be enough for Vanessa are echoed, when Elizabeth makes Flush 'feel that there was something petty, silly, affected, in his old affectionate ways' (60). Like Elizabeth, Vanessa may have found such devotion a fitting subject of ridicule. Quoting the poet's original letter, Virginia cites an example of Elizabeth's sarcasm: "Flush always makes the most of his misfortunes – he is of the byronic school – *il se pose en victime*." (63) In the following passage the narrator sides with Flush without a touch of irony:

> But here Miss Barrett, absorbed in her own emotions, misjudged him completely. If his paw had been broken, still he would have bounded. That dash was his answer to her mockery; I have done with you—that was the meaning he flashed at her as he ran. The flowers smelt bitter to him; the grass burnt his paws; the dust filled his nostrils with disillusion. But he raced—he scampered. (63)

Elizabeth's absorption in her love affair makes her a bad judge of others', especially Flush's, emotions. This scene exemplifies the 'vast gaps in their understanding' and Elizabeth is 'completely' wrong about her dog (34). Flush does the exact opposite to "*il se pose en victime*": he poses an indifference—scorned, he pretends to be stronger than he actually is. The park, usually a favourite haunt, does not ease his pain: instead of a green paradise, the 'bitter' vegetation, 'burn[ing]' sand, and 'the dust' suggest a hellish desert (63). This encourages us to acknowledge the serious tone of the passage; significantly, the cocker spaniel joins Virginia's animal menagerie of beasts expressing and representing emotions, which in

human register would have risked ridicule—as exemplified by Elizabeth. Even if for a brief while, with the full emotional and perspectival support of the narrator, Flush provides the author with a dignified verbalisation of scorned love.

PARALLEL LIVES

Critics have only in recent decades grown more comfortable with reading *Flush: A Biography* as being about a dog—conventionally, it has been interpreted as a representation of something else, which in an anthropocentric reading tradition justifies its study. I wish to contribute to its consideration as a serious biography the observation that Flush's life often parallels the lives of Virginia and Vanessa, providing yet another example of mixing the biographical with the autobiographical, and of Virginia's life-writing 'subsum[ing] nonfiction under fiction', to cite David Herman, since 'only fiction provides unfettered access to the inner life that constitutes true subjectivity.'[54] In my analogous reading of the three lives – Flush's, Virginia's, and Vanessa's – I want to emphasise the way these life narratives run in parallel, and thus indicate a further link between *Flush* and the sister relationship.[55]

In their similarly dark and oppressive Victorian homes, both Flush and the Stephen sisters were trained into a patriarchal culture. When Flush joins the household, '[a]ll his natural instincts [are] thwarted and contradicted' under a new order of an education 'of the bedroom', akin to what Virginia called the sisters' '"tea-table training"' (31—2).[56] Flush quickly learns that in Victorian London, wherever men parade in 'shiny top-hats' on a patriarchal catwalk, 'dogs must be led on chains', which is tellingly associated with '[t]hat collar I have spoken of' in relation to women and fiction in *A Room of One's Own*, where too the grass is forbidden (29).[57] These rigid controls were not unlike the rules imposed on Elizabeth Barrett, such as presenting an empty plate to her father after finishing a meal. One may speculate who in fact cleaned off Virginia's enforced meals; she certainly delighted in describing Flush's dexterity in 'le[aving] no trace behind' on Elizabeth's plates (42). Indeed conspiratorial help was appreciated by both Virginia, whose father's tragic moods

[54] David Herman, 'Modernist Life Writing and Nonhuman Lives: Ecologies of Experience in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (2013), p.553.
[55] In 'Housebroken: The Domesticated Relations of Flush' (1996), David Eberly interprets Flush's 'Whitechapel' episode autobiographically, suggesting links between Flush's experiences and Virginia's molestation in the hands of Gerald. I am more interested in the similarities between the general narratives, which highlight the sympathy of shared herstory.
[56] Quoted in Dunn, p.28.
[57] *A Room of One's Own*, p.4.

overshadowed the home, and Elizabeth, whose father 'growls' like 'thunder' or 'the voice of God' (43).

As Vanessa was Virginia's co-conspirator, Flush is Elizabeth's; stationed in the same bedroom, he knows all her secrets. When Elizabeth starts regaining health, 'only Flush knew where her strength came from—it came from the dark man in the armchair' (56). The silent conspiracy between Flush and Elizabeth, like that of Phyllis and Rosamond, exists right under Mr. Barrett's inobservant nose and climaxes as the elopement draws nearer. Flush remains 'quiet', because '[s]he was very quiet too', and the excitement grows tangible to the little dog: 'He lay by her side scarcely daring to breathe, for whatever had happened, it was something that must at all costs be concealed.' (98) Unswerving loyalty – like that which Virginia showed when the rest of the family sided against Vanessa and Jack Hills – is one of Flush's most admirable characteristics. Virginia focuses on the vast importance Flush places on keeping his mistress' secret: 'Not for anything in the whole world would he have broken that tremendous silence.' (101) Attuned to Elizabeth's mood, Flush mirrors it, and despite all the excitement, holds his tongue for his co-conspirator's benefit.

Of the biographical parallels, critics have paid most attention to the affinities between the disruptions caused by Robert in Flush's relationship with Elizabeth and the challenges in Virginia's relationship with her sister, and the duty of love which prevails at the end: Flush, like Virginia, is 'reassured that there was a continuing place for himself in her new life.'[58] As we have seen, sororal love has a dark side; possessiveness, jealousy, and aggression are also aspects of Flush's love. Dunn argues that *Flush* enabled exploring 'the pain of rejection when that sister fell in love with someone else'—Clive.[59] In *Flush*, 'The Hooded Man' chapter is narrated in a voice peculiarly uncensored and emotionally urgent, as it covers the terror of losing or being rejected by a loved one, when Flush's 'firelit cave' existence with Elizabeth is terminated by the emergence of a Man with absurdly yellow gloves (54). Robert displays many of the qualities Virginia found most infuriating in Clive: his vanity – he is 'well groomed' (52) and 'so well tailored' (58) – and his pompous, interruptive masculinity—in Flush's view Robert is 'so tight, so muscular' and 'masterly, abrupt', with a 'horrid decision, a dreadful boldness mark[ing] [his] every movement' (58—59, 54). Such feelings of anger, abandonment, and fear of replacement resurface when the Browning baby is born but settle eventually—a chain of events much like Virginia's initial adverse feelings at Julian's birth and her later notable affection for Vanessa's children.

[58] Dunn, p.5.
[59] Dunn, p.5.

Jealousy, as already discussed, is inherent to sister relationships and is often expressed exaggeratedly. As Vanita remarks, Flush constitutes a safe 'graphic picture of jealousy, because the created situation – a dog loving a woman – allowed her to express rage, despair, even murderous feelings without being' accused of exaggeration, 'since comic exaggeration was the chosen mode.'[60] Although Lee's reading of *Flush* as a parody of Virginia's hopeless mania for her sister is supported by the narrator's general ironic distance to Flush, the dog does not think himself parodic. Vanita points out that 'what Flush feels is anything but absurd to him', although even Miss Barrett 'laughed, pityingly; as if it were absurd', when Flush mourns losing his primary claim to Elizabeth's love. (55)[61] As we read, 'poor Flush could feel nothing of what [Elizabeth] felt. He could know nothing of what she knew.' (55) For Flush, Elizabeth's new love destroys their closeness: 'Never had such wastes of dismal distance separated them.' (55) As Virginia had to 'learn to accept' that 'Clive is a new part of [Vanessa],'[62] Flush also, because he loves Elizabeth, must accept Robert: 'Things are not simple but complex. If he bit Mr. Browning he bit her too. Hatred is not hatred; hatred is also love.' (67) 'His flesh [is] veined with human passions': he is both an expression and embodiment of, and a person plagued by, complex feelings; he knows love and loyalty and 'all grades of jealousy, anger and despair' (127).

Furthermore, Flush is a reworking of the sisters' biographical herstory of emerging from the gloom of Kensington into the sunlight of an alternative, liberated world, encountered in Chapter 1. Jutta Ittner writes that 'Flush's and his mistress's liberation from the overheated preciousness of an invalid's bedroom also parallels Virginia Woolf's liberation in moving from the stuffy Victorian family household in Kensington to the brave new world that she and Vanessa established in Bloomsbury.'[63] Even the interiors of Casa Guidi are made to echo the near-bare walls of 46 Gordon Square. There are particular parallels between Flush and Vanessa, who both preferred the country to the city, and in Vanessa's appreciation of sunny Southern Europe; years before *Flush*'s conception, she had written to Virginia from Siena these lines which are uncannily alike to the worldview Flush matures into:

> It is really delicious to be in Italy. All the smells are so good. The air is warm & the colours divine. I feel like a lost & lazy cat stretching myself in it. [...] [if they rented

[60] Vanita, p.253.
[61] Vanita, p.253.
[62] *Letters*, I, p.276.
[63] Jutta Ittner, 'Part Spaniel, Part Canine Puzzle: Anthropomorphism in Woolf's *Flush* and Auster's *Timbuktu*', *Mosaic*, 4 (2006), p.189.

a villa from Italy] we would all loaf & have love affairs by the dozen & become creatures of the senses alone. Doesn't the idea attract you?[64]

Virginia's relations with Vanessa remained emotive throughout her life, although their partnerships with others, primarily Leonard and Duncan, marked an opening-up for new relations and, as Kuba observes in sister relationships in general, provided 'a cornerstone for increased maturity in the sister bond'.[65] This gradual toning down of Virginia's intense dependency on her older sister is demonstrated both in the varying level of intensity between her early work and *Flush* and within *Flush* itself. In Florence, the relationship between Elizabeth and Flush eases out into a stable friendship: 'her relations with Flush were far less emotional now than in the old days' (111). Elizabeth embraces the new life in her own manner, and Flush, an advocate of loving in triangles, makes use of Casa Guidi's open doors, spending nights with this or that spotted spaniel. In Italy his greatest battle is one with fleas, which, funnily enough, recalls the first time Virginia cut her hair short: 'I cant describe the delight when the long coil of cold hair fell off, and my neck was exposed,' she wrote to Vanessa, praising the easiness of the new hair-do.[66] Echoing Orlando's metamorphosis, 'the potent spirits of truth and laughter' whisper to Flush after his transformation (129). In his clipped fur, Flush comes to a conclusion, which looks back to the Dreadnought Hoax and foreshadows *Three Guineas* (1938): 'To caricature the pomposity of those who claim that they are something—was that not in its way a career?' (130) Pure breeding and its insignia, which at first justified Flush's self-aggrandisement, now come to mean 'nothing' (129).[67] This nullification is consoling and liberating, since the rules of breeding were rigid and absolute, although Flush, thanks to his impeccable cocker looks, is allowed to breed without anyone's disapproval – so was Vanessa – whereas Virginia was less favoured by those making the decisions.

So the main events of *Flush*'s plot find their equivalent incidents in the sisters' lives. Virginia reworks materials from multiple biographical sources – Flush's, her own and her sister's – to produce a story that serves the two masters, fact and fiction. *Flush* is an excellent example of how her biographer's imagination is 'stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life', and indeed her

[64] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, undated, Monday, probably May 1912.
[65] Kuba, p.301.
[66] She claimed that 'though it loses me the love of sister, lover, and niece, I dont regret it', and in her diary described the shingling as 'the most important event in my life since marriage'. She evidently delighted in imagining the back of her head now as 'a partridges rump' (*Letters*, III, p.334; *Diary*, III, p.127).
[67] For a discussion of the political implications of these concerns, see Anna Snaith, 'Of Fanciers, Footnotes, and Fascism: Virginia Woolf's *Flush*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (2002), 614—636.

and Vanessa's shared herstory influences the selective emphases and the rendition of Flush's voice.[68] We also note how, at times, Flush is identified with Vanessa, at other times with Virginia. Like the canine protagonist, his human owner shares characteristics with each sister. Elizabeth Barrett, of course, is a professional of language, like Virginia, who was also the 'invalid' whose health worried the family.[69] Virginia's explanation of Barrett Browning's contribution to the birth of modern poetry could indeed be applied to herself—and her sister: 'she was a wilful breaker of rules whether of art or of love' (159—60). The links Virginia draws between Barrett Browning and Vanessa highlight Vanessa's importance as an artist and commit to a degree of interchangeability between the Stephen sisters. Yet, as we will see, this interchangeability is accompanied by an imaginative interest in the distance between the two main characters, in which we begin to observe an acceptance of difference even within the most intimate bonds.

'MADE IN THE SAME MOLD': COEVOLUTION

After locating Vanessa and the sister relationship at the heart of *Flush*, it might feel counter-intuitive to turn to animal theory for interpretative aids. However, it seems that on a general level, after considering equality between human peers, the next step in kinship studies is acknowledging the kin ties we make and maintain with non-human animals—indeed the ever-pioneering Haraway attests that '[i]n old-fashioned terms, [her] *Companion Species Manifesto* is a kinship claim'.[70] On a more particular level, seriously thinking about a dog took Virginia closer to an acceptance of Mitchell's law of the mother, that is, of difference within sameness, than her previous work had done. While the following pages will be populated by critics who have read *Flush* from a point-of-view informed by animal studies, I am also aware of the anthropomorphic and -centric flaws in the book. To the extent possible, I wish to distance my reading from the phenomenon of oedipalisation of animals; I do not want to suggest that Flush is a mere 'psychoanalytic facad[e] with "a daddy, a mommy, a little brother"', or an elder sister 'behind him'.[71] Rather than labelling Flush "an evasion or a substitution", I believe, like Marjorie Garber, than the dog-human relationship "calls upon the same range and depth of feelings that humans have for

[68] 'The New Biography', p.100.
[69] Virginia's essay on Barrett Browning's masterpiece, *Aurora Leigh*, reflects some of her own professional fears in her statement that no one reads or discusses Barrett Browning—such fears also bothered Vanessa. 'Aurora Leigh', in *Women and Writing*, ed. by Michèle Barrett (Tiptree: The Women's Press, 1979), pp.133—144 (134).
[70] Haraway (2003), pp.8—9.
[71] Derek Ryan, *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.63.

humans".[72] By reading *Flush* as a sororal text I do not hope to add to the criticism that reads it as being about something other than a dog, but to add to the understanding of the ways in which the book explores kinship practices and especially the process of coming to terms with strangeness within kinship. To do this, I will borrow three terms from animal theory: coevolution, face-to-face gazing and interspecies kissing.

The first look that passes between Flush and Elizabeth can be examined through coevolution and face-to-face gazing. This scene establishes that Flush, a 'ruddy' animal, and Elizabeth, a 'pale' 'invalid' are strongly alike, but also so 'different!' (23):

> Broken asunder, yet made in the same mold, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? [...] But no. Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other. (24)

The species barrier divides them, pre-destining certain intimacies to be shared only with 'new Red Ape[s]'.[73] Nonetheless the lucid moment holds Elizabeth and Flush under its spell for a while, as they are transfixed by their likeness and by how 'closely united' they are.

'Coevolution' is a central term in Haraway's companion species theory; she holds that dogs and humans, as companion species, have evolved together and share mutual perceptions and needs. Companion species are mutually adapted partners that co-shape each other, and as Payal Taneja writes, 'Elizabeth and Flush may be seen as what Haraway calls "co-constitutive companion species", engaged in interactions that transform each participant for the better.'[74] Flush is a help and an inspiration for Elizabeth, and their Bildungs are intertwined and reach simultaneous conclusions. Thus, though 'broken asunder,' the twoness of the pair, bound by many dark years of cave-like existence, emerges as the biography's central theme.

Virginia was intrigued by the poet's and her dog's coevolutionary lives, as well as their physical likeness: 'Yes, they are much alike', she revels.[75] Her Elizabeth, too, acknowledges the resemblance and delights in it: once she draws a "characteristic portrait of Flush, humorously made rather like myself" (37). As Ittner writes, dogs, more than any 'other species that have served as pets, [...] form the close, merging relationships with their

[72] Marjorie Garber quoted in Ryan (2015), p.99.
[73] *Letters*, VI, p.493.
[74] Payal Taneja, 'Gift-Fiving and Domesticating the Upper-Class Pooch in *Flush*', *Mosaic*, 1 (2016), p.137.
[75] *Letters*, V, p.234.

humans that satisfy our need to be mirrored.'[76] Such mirroring may be explained by dogs' unique (among non-human animals) ability to respond to a human's gaze; Juliane Kaminski observes dogs are 'attuned to the direction of the human gaze, something not achieved by [...] the chimpanzee'.[77] This phenomenon supports human-canine coevolutionary stories, and is particularly interesting since dogs do not show the ability with their own species. Noting this, Elizabeth's mirroring of herself onto Flush or Virginia's projection of human traits do not appear so fanciful.

Likewise, the social and artistic educations of the Stephen sisters were entangled and in constant dialogue throughout their lives; and at least during their Kensington years, they shared rooms, beds, clothes, and baths, which in a Harawayan imagination calls to surface '*genomes*' that '*are more alike than they should be*' and '*some molecular record of our touch*'.[78] Years of the bedroom or tea-table schooling established the strong foundation of the sisters' bond, as it does for Flush and Elizabeth: 'It seemed as if nothing were to break that tie—as if the years were merely to compact and cement it.' (46) Besides a shared everyday, the early traumatic losses strengthened the bond, like Whitechapel influenced Flush and Elizabeth: 'Indeed they had never been so much akin. Every start she gave, every movement she made, passed through him too.' (97) Their bond issues 'an uncomfortable yet thrilling tightness; so that if his pleasure was her pain, then his pleasure was pleasure no longer but three parts pain,' robbing Flush of some of his existential isolation (34). Flush seems attuned to Elizabeth's body: besides reading her body language as plain 'signs that nobody else could even see', he even shares her experience of giving birth, as he senses 'that something was thrusting its way into the house' (48, 120). Yet at times, the 'different spectacles' caused the sisters to appreciate different things, and likewise, in Italy, Mrs Browning and Flush reach 'different conclusions in their voyages of discovery—she a Grand Duke, he a spotted spaniel' (117).[79] In the 1930s, Virginia was growing increasingly polemical, whereas Vanessa enjoyed the isolation and domesticity of her country residences. And yet, in both cases, 'the tie which bound them together was undeniably still binding' (117).

The image of the bind emphasises the duality of the set and its inseparability. It is also one of Haraway's emphatic images in writing about the 'joint lives of dogs and people, who are bonded in significant otherness'; one of her training stories is titled 'Positive Bondage'.[80] The bind, as a descriptor of the Stephen sisters' relationship, seems to have

[76] Ittner, p.183.
[77] Ryan (2013), p.150.
[78] Haraway (2003), p.2.
[79] *Letters*, VI, p.158.
[80] Haraway (2003), p.16, 43.

appealed not only to themselves, but to other Bloomsbury members too. Dunn finds that the sisters' contemporaries 'saw their relationship complementary and impassioned, as the source at times of an almost mythic power' and, especially in their 20s, they were a famous indivisible set of two, many of their suitors falling in love with both.[81]

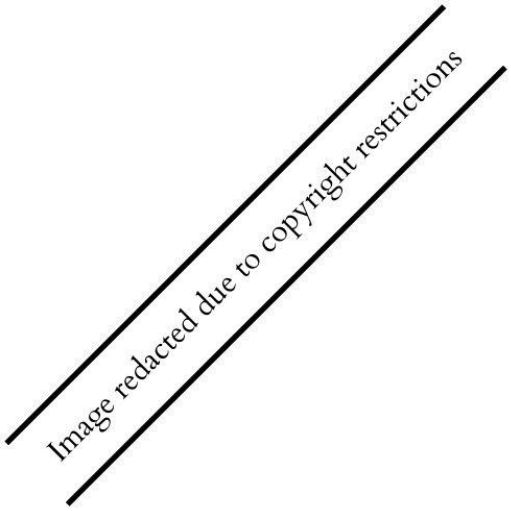

Figure 14. Quentin Bell, *The Two Miss Stephens* (1925).

This is exemplified by this caricature drawn by Quentin Bell, in which his father Clive meets the sisters, whose profiles and outlines merge into one another, and who are in fact only separated by the colours of their dresses. Whereas Clive has a well-defined figure of his own, the sisters seem to share limbs and to occupy the same space. At least in this representation, the sisters are bound by 'an uncomfortable yet thrilling tightness', which coevolutionarily impacts their physical form.

FACE-TO-FACE

Responding and mutual recognition, as we witness in the scene of Flush and Elizabeth gazing at each other, are central criteria in defining coevolution: companion species 'are face-to-face, in the company of significant others'.[82] Haraway writes that being face-to-face is 'not romantic or idealist but mundane and consequential'—certainly it is such a face-to-face moment with an animal that sparked Derrida's deconstruction of 'animal'. Observing that his cat was able to look *at* him, he argued that animals' ability to look at and address us

[81] Dunn, pp.5—6.
[82] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.93.

is 'something that philosophy perhaps forgets.'[83] Flush is maybe an unusual animal—not in his ability to face Elizabeth, but in his desire to be looked at, since, as Randy Malamud states, usually animals do not choose to partake in our visual culture.[84] Flush, however, is a strongly visual – both observant and good-looking – animal, and such face-to-face gazes are pivotal moments of both affinity and polarity. Humm recognises Flush and Elizabeth's gaze as a particularly modernist moment: 'Woolf re-presents faces as surface in a truly modernist way like Vanessa Bell's featureless paintings.'[85] If faces are surface, and a dog may see himself in a woman and vice versa, one is indeed confronted with a radical mutuality.

Derek Ryan writes extensively about these face-to-face moments in *Flush* and argues that despite the differences between the participants, the importance of these gazes lies in 'the fact that there has been a moment of mutual recognition.'[86] As the narration shows, moving fluently from Elizabeth's point-of-view to Flush's, Flush responds to Elizabeth's thoughts by sharing them; a face recognises a face and the experience is shared. Each is surprised by their similar features: heavy, brown, hanging curls; large, bright eyes; and a wide mouth. 'There was a likeness between them' – and they recognise this instantly – 'As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I' (23). As an experience this projection is fundamentally narcissistic: one sees the self mirrored in the beloved. As Vanita points out, this image 'pervades much writing about homoerotic feeling,' emphasising 'physical and mental affinity' and celebrating sameness.[87] Ryan, too, by switching a preposition in his suggestion that Flush and Elizabeth are 'face-in-face', underlines their physical intimacy.[88]

Yet difference is required to make it possible to face each other. Flush and Elizabeth's bond is far from untroubled single-mindedness: 'There were vast gaps in their understanding,' in fact so astounding that sometimes they only 'lie and stare at each other in blank bewilderment' (34). This unknowability of the other is the undercurrent of *Flush*'s last chapter. Flush has found himself a new social space as the communal dog of all Florence, after which Elizabeth's new interest in spirits distances them further. Once again Flush and Elizabeth see things differently: 'whatever the ladies and gentlemen round the table could hear and see, Flush could hear and see nothing' (144). Elizabeth's world of spirits is not visible to Flush, perhaps because of their different perspectives on life: Elizabeth yearns to

[83] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.11.
[84] Randy Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.3. Malamud argues that humans' picturing of animals is often harmful or dangerous to the animal depicted. On the contrary, Flush relies on Elizabeth's look.
[85] Humm (2010), p.226.
[86] Ryan (2013), p.145.
[87] Vanita, p.250.
[88] Ryan (2013), p.148.

connect the worlds of the living and dead, but Flush only lives and, at the end, is 'dead. That was all.' (153) As Elizabeth becomes more spiritual, she loses sight of Flush, who becomes horrified: 'She looked through him as if he were not there. That was the cruellest look she had ever given him.' (147) The worst possible thing to happen to Flush is Elizabeth not seeing him; likewise, Virginia required acknowledgement by Vanessa, as her consistent pleas for attention show. Towards the end of the last chapter, the narrator distances herself from the dog again, and the speculations about Flush's dreams and terrors are presented with question marks. Flush, as the other, remains unknowable, as did Vanessa, whose thoughts were always a point of interest to Virginia and yet somehow mysterious and incomprehensible. Yet, significantly, in the last pages, Flush and Elizabeth's bond is confirmed, as he once more 'thrust[s] his face into hers' (152). After a final face-to-face gaze, between Elizabeth's two looks, Flush dies. As Ryan points out, the reason Flush no longer answers or reflects back his companion's gaze is not because he is a dog, but because he is dead.[89] So ends the story that from the beginning has been driven by an earnest wish to see and know the other.

INTERSPECIES KISSING

After a long, longing gaze, a kiss is the natural next step. To consider interspecies kissing, I want to turn to another meaningful face-to-face moment in *Flush*. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's two poems written in Flush's praise, 'To Flush, My Dog' and 'Flush or Faunus', bear an interesting resemblance to the images Virginia employed in her fictionalised, and epistolary, portraits of Vanessa. These tantalised visions of the loved one as a superhuman being form the pivoting points of narration in *Flush*, and one of them provides the central image of interspecies kissing. Barrett Browning, who firmly believed in Flush's human intelligence and taught him to count and read, uses numerous comparisons to portray Flush: he is like a poet, a philosopher, and a deity, Faunus. This image of Flush as Faunus becomes a central vision in the novel: it is established early in Elizabeth and Flush's acquaintance, repeated when Elizabeth forgives Flush for attacking Robert, and again at the very end, right before Flush's death, when the poem is quoted in full. As a consistent depiction of Elizabeth's emotion for Flush, it shows the mistress to love her dog '[w]ith a love that answers thine'.[90] Virginia narrates the moment the comparison, and, as is implied,

[89] Ryan (2013), p.149.
[90] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'To Flush, My Dog', in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: John Murray, 1914), pp.254—256, l.119.

the poem first come to Elizabeth's mind with vocabulary carefully reflecting the poet's original expressions: 'A head as hairy as Faunus' is 'pressed against her,' and she wonders (37)[91]:

> Was it Flush, or was it Pan? Was she no longer an invalid in Wimpole Street, but a Greek nymph in some dim grove in Arcady? And did the bearded god himself press his lips to hers? For a moment she was transformed; she was a nymph and Flush was Pan. The sun burnt and love blazed. (37—8)

The moment of transformation is temporary; yet the luminous impression is strong enough to repeat itself throughout the book.

Faunus is a creature of suitably blurred species boundaries for Virginia's purposes in *Flush.* Half-goat (suitably for 'Goat'), and half-man, Faunus defies and stands in-between the species barriers and conceptualisations of 'animal' and 'human'. Jane Goldman and Ittner make a connection between Woolf's shared space of blurred boundaries, and Giorgio Agamben's idea of the Open, which is 'the empty interval between man and animal that is neither animal life nor human life.'[92] As Ryan writes, on some level, Flush seems to respond to Elizabeth's Arcadian vision: 'So, too, Flush felt strange stirrings at work within him.' (38) Ryan suggests that both Elizabeth and Flush thus imagine 'a time and place when they could be [...] closer.'[93] Between and beyond the culturally constructed answers to question of identity and acceptable forms of love, Woolf and Barrett Browning envision a transformation, or a moment of divine fusion. In the last line of her poem, Barrett Browning praises the lesson learned by Pan: he leads humans to 'heights of love', which is the divine gift of 'the true Pan,' the god of blurred boundaries.[94]

The mythological Pan is strongly associated with the wilderness, and in particular, goats and flocks, as well as rampant sexuality, and was, fittingly for Flush and Elizabeth's 'firelit cave', frequently worshipped in caves. In addition to depicting Vanessa as an earth goddess, Virginia interestingly also likened her to a sexually vibrant male god. For example, she imagined her as a deity during her engagement to Clive and their early marriage. Writing to Violet, Virginia cites vigorous details of Vanessa's 'streamer, red as blood,' 'a shooting cap,' and 'great brown boots,' and then apotheosises her: 'she was tawny

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[91] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Flush or Faunus', in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, p.292, l.5.
[92] Jane Goldman, '"Ce chien est à moi": Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog', *Woolf Studies Annual* (2007), p.53. See also Ittner, p.183.
[93] Ryan (2013), p.146.
[94] 'Flush or Faunus', , l.14, l.13.

and jubilant and lusty as a young God.'[95] The adjectives make Vanessa very Pan-like and quite the opposite of the feminine, virginal goddess of hunting. Furthermore, writing to Clive, she associates Vanessa with 'such beauty—grandeur—and freedom—as of panthers,' animals linked to god Dionysus, whose retinue Faunus is a part of.[96] Indeed, like Barrett Browning, Virginia pictured her sister as an animalistic god in order to express what Vanessa, like Flush, contributed to her life: vitality and vision.

Species boundaries are blurred vigorously by Woolf's changing Barrett Browning's vaguer – though penetrative – 'thrust its way/Right sudden against my face' into direct questions about an interspecies kiss: is Elizabeth licked by Flush, or a nymph kissed by the 'goatly god'?[97] Virginia's letters, especially those to Vita, leave little space to doubt the eroticism of such fusions of kissing (human action) and licking (the canine equivalent). Interspecies kissing is also one of Haraway's most arresting images in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, which begins with the bold declaration that she and her Australian Shepherd '*have had forbidden conversation; we have had oral intercourse*'.[98] This kissing defies species barriers and other prohibitions and enacts the fleshy intimacy of the kinship-bonding in action. The kissing is 'telling[, ...] embodied communication dependent on those very tissues and organs used to produce speech,' and, quoting Haraway, Ryan sees 'these kissing companion species' as 'molecularly coevolving.'[99] This is exactly why the vision of Flush as Faunus and the questionable and questioning kiss become so central to *Flush*.

With kissing in mind, I return to the last look before Flush's death, which is preceded by Barrett Browning's 'Flush or Faunus'. This last look echoes their first gaze, implying the book's most central question: 'could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other?' (24) The question is no longer answered with an abrupt 'But no.' (24) Instead, the poem draws us back to the interspecies kiss and to the moment of the Faunus vision's conception. We are returned to Elizabeth's questioning of the power of language: 'do words say everything?', she muses, becoming even more doubtful: 'Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words?' (37) Indeed, the fact that Flush and Elizabeth do not share the same language or medium leads to 'a peculiar intimacy' (37). Words are, after all, the most definite barrier dividing human and animal, as well as crucial to Virginia's characterisation of the difference between herself and Vanessa, but here they are void; instead, she relies on an image beyond words, the

[95] *Letters*, I, p.275.
[96] *Letters*, I, pp.329—330.
[97] 'Flush or Faunus', l.5—6, l.10.
[98] Haraway (2003), p.2.
[99] Derek Ryan, 'Chapter 8. Orlando's Queer Animals', in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jessica Berman (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp.109—120 (112).

vision of Pan and the nymph kissing, performing an alternative form of communication with speech organs and producing intimacy that is queer, anomalous and strange.

Yet whatever level of peculiarity we grant the dog, I argue that even more significant than his strangeness, is the responsiveness of this 'Loving fellow-creature', to borrow Barrett Browning.[100] Clever ontological and identity-related questions have been made by animal study theorists like Ryan linking Flush to Derrida's cat and other empirical animals, but I want to note that Flush does not reach any conclusions regarding selfhood when he gazes into the mirror. Instead, to anchor himself back to reality, he quickly *turns back to* Elizabeth: 'unable to solve the problem of reality, [he] pressed closer to Miss Barrett and kissed her "expressively". *That* was real at any rate.' (45) Flush finds reality in an expressive kiss, demonstrating that such mutuality – a 'love that answers thine' – is at the heart of kinship performance in *Flush*.[101] Like Virginia's kissing and cuddling epistolary animals, Flush is fundamentally corresponsive, and so are the kissing dogs across Virginia's oeuvre, which Ryan reads as embodiments of coevolution and 'an openness to other modes of communication'.[102] They are participants in the most intimate of exchanges as well as in the dialogue between painting and writing, which we will now turn to, and which 'have much to tell each other'.[103]

'THE SILENT LAND'

For an animal of the modernist period, Flush is unusually visible. Steve Baker argues that modernism is typically hostile to the animal, making it '*disappear*.'[104] But, considering the vibrantly visual representation of Flush and his (very) good looks, perhaps we may find his kin within visual culture; as the visual theorist W.J.T. Mitchell proposes in *What Do Pictures Want?*, 'pictures want to be kissed' and 'of course we want to kiss them back.'[105] As we have already witnessed, also in *Flush* kissing illustrates an alternative, 'non-linguistic' way of communicating and becoming entangled.[106] These interspecies alliances are 'messy, impure', to borrow Ryan's Harraway-inspired terms, and they can constitute not only 'a meaning-

[100] 'To Flush, My Dog', l.120.
[101] 'To Flush, My Dog', l.119.
[102] Ryan (2016), p.112.
[103] Virginia Woolf, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1934), p.22. Further references will appear in the body text.
[104] Baker, p.285. Baker finds that modernist representations of animals do not involve sympathy (p.286). Although this thesis does not have the scope for it, *Flush* could offer a conducive point-of-departure for a revision of visible and sympathetic modernist animality.
[105] W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.xvi.
[106] Ryan (2015), p.67.

making', but even a 'world-making encounter of its own.'[107] Pointed by these theorists towards a non-linguistic mess, the remainder of this chapter will consider what animal theory can offer *Flush* and its visual contexts. I will discuss two non-linguistic alternative forms of meaning-making and becoming entangled, and in my exploration of these visual and olfactory possibilities, I make alliances between *Flush* and a number of contemporary sources: Vanessa's paintings, Virginia's pamphlet *Walter Sickert. A Conversation* (1934) and Virginia's two forewords to Vanessa's exhibitions (1930, 1934), and consider these alongside concepts from animal theory, such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's becoming-animal. First, we will visit the land of silence, the painters' realm, keeping in mind the links to alternative and sororal spaces this thesis has already made.

Flush is of course allied with the land without language. As we have seen, even Elizabeth, one of the 'greatest poets in the world', wonders about her medium's ability to say 'everything [...] anything', invoking a signifying power 'beyond the reach of words' (124, 37). Flush's biographer, too, admits the inadequacy, which forces her to 'come to a pause': she declares that to 'describe [Flush's] simplest experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power' (124—5). The written word can convey an understanding neither of his olfactory experience nor his sense of touch. Flush, and his knowledge of the 'marmoreal smoothness' and 'gritty and cobbled roughness' of Florence, stand above language: 'Upon the infinitely sensitive pads of his feet he took the clear stamp of proud Latin inscriptions.' (126) Even the finest of human languages cannot capture Flush's multisensory tactile experience; he knows Florence in a manner different from Ruskin or George Eliot: 'He knew it only as the dumb know. Not a single one of his myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words.' (127) Writers dismissed, the task of knowing is left to the 'dumb', whose ways of knowing do not 'deform' the 'myriad sensations' but are committed to authentic forms. Painters, in Virginia's characterisations, are often 'dumb'—the word, with its double meaning, is certainly childishly pleasing. She frequently wrote that 'painting tends to dumbness.'[108] But it appears that some experience can only be depicted via their wordless media, which may be why '[t]he silent painters, Cézanne and Mr. Sickert, make fools of us as often as they choose'.[109] Flush's animal silence is indeed akin to the muteness of painters such as 'Picasso, Sickert, Mrs. Bell', who 'are all mute as mackerel.'[110]

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[107] Ryan (2015), p.67.
[108] *Letters*, II, p.382.
[109] Virginia Woolf, 'Pictures', in *The Moment and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975), pp.173—178 (176).
[110] 'Pictures', p.178.

We find such non-human silence at the centre of *Walter Sickert. A Conversation*, which Gillespie calls 'Woolf's culminating piece of formal art criticism'.[111] The pamphlet imagines—or recalls—a dinner party's conversation about the relationship of the arts, during which the painters, likely fashioned on Vanessa and Duncan, in their way of discussing Sickert, 'fetched a book of photographs from Sickert's paintings and began cutting off a hand or a head, and made them connect or separate, not as a hand or a head but as if they had some quite different relationship' (11). This fragmentation of the figures and their re-arrangement into new connections alerts the witnessing writers to the fact that this creative play with form sends the painters off 'into the silent land' to where the literary have no access, and where the painters are 'out of reach of the human voice' (11). Virginia likens the painters' vision of new forms and their 'different relationship[s]' to a canine sense: 'They are seeing things that we cannot see, just as a dog bristles and whines in a dark lane when nothing is visible to human eyes.' (11) Something in this non-human connection to a dark, wordless place in the subconscious makes one's hair stand stiff; the origin of the painter's, or the dog's, excitement is 'so deeply sunk that they cannot put words to it' (11).

Even with her obvious writer's reserves, Virginia speculates that there may be 'a zone of silence in the middle of every art', where Elizabeth's symbol may lie undestroyed, and finds the 'great stretch[es] of silent territory' in pictures 'extraordinarily satisfying' (11, 25). Like Flush's biographer, the narrator of *Walter Sickert* admits her failure to 'force our lips to frame it', but remains in awe of its emotion, 'distinct, powerful and satisfactory' (25). In an echo of the deforming threat of words in *Flush*, the pamphlet calls biography out for 'hundred[s of] pages of compromise, evasion, understatement, overstatement, irrelevance and downright falsehood', and by contrasting written biography with Sickert's painted 'biography': with his 'divine gift of silence', the painter captures it all—'lies, paltriness, splendour, depravity, endurance, beauty' (13). Ironically, the 'impure medium' of words is judged unable to portray life's messiness; 'better far to have been born into the silent kingdom of paint' (13).

What, then, is this silent land like, which painters can enter? One of the speakers gives the answer in her lament that the painters 'have gone much farther into the forest than we shall ever go' (26). This is 'the forest' of the extensive image from the beginning of the *Conversation*, where the different ways people see colour are considered: the speaker relates rumours of insects, 'found in the primeval forests of South America', who 'are all eye', and

[111] Gillespie, p.8. I am not concerned with the essay's significance for Woolf's aesthetics, but readers may want to consult Gillespie, pp.94—102.

who live and die with flowers.[112] 'A hard-headed man' witnessed 'these little creatures drinking crimson until they became crimson; then flitting on to violet; then to a vivid green, and becoming for the moment the thing they saw—red, green, blue, whatever the colour [...] might be' (8). The diners go on to wonder:

> Were we once insects like that, too, one of the diners asked; all eye? Do we still preserve the capacity for drinking, eating, indeed becoming colour furled up in us, waiting proper conditions to develop? For as the rocks hide fossils, so we hide tigers, baboons, and perhaps insects, under our coats and hats. On first entering a picture gallery, whose stillness, warmth and seclusion from the perils of the street reproduce the conditions of the primeval forest, it often seems as if we reverted to the insect stage of our long life. (8)

A lot of 'becoming' occurs in this passage. The 'little creatures' become colour through multisensory interactions: drinking, touching, seeing 'whatever' colour gets them fundamentally entangled in it. For the humans, the central questions are 'were we once [...] like that, too' and do we still preserve the ability to become colour—both of which evoke not only the possibility of humans having become unlike the 'little creatures' but also an evolutionary connection to the animals from which we have become, proposing essential links and fundamental differences between the primeval insects and the colour they can become, as well as humans and our animal ancestors.

This primeval forest resides in Flush's subconscious, too: in his old age, his sleep is deep and 'the darkness seem[s] to thicken round him' (139). Often he does not dream, but reposes in some primordial darkness, but when he does dream, it is of a similar tropical forest inhabited by the 'all eye' insects:

> [H]e dreamt that he was sleeping in the heart of a primeval forest, shut from the light of the sun, shut from the voices of mankind, though now and again as he slept he dreamt that he heard the sleepy chirp of a dreaming bird, or, as the wind tossed the branches, the mellow chuckle of a brooding monkey. (139)

Although a domestic creature, Flush has retained access to the primeval forest, which is 'shut from the voices of mankind'. The memory, passed on to his subconscious by some

[112] I am using the relative pronoun 'who' in imitation of Woolf, who also refers to these insects with 'who' and 'whom' (p.7).

cross-species memory – for Flush has never been to a jungle – is vague. When there are voices, these are animals', and even then they are 'sleepy', 'dreaming', 'mellow', or 'brooding'. Like in 'the silent land' of *Walter Sickert*, the silence denotes the absence of human language, rather than of all noise. When awake, although Flush is literally not 'all eye' as the insects, he interacts with colour in the same metaphoric and metonymic manner, and through his primary canine sense, smell: 'always with his nose to the ground, drinking in the essence', Flush roams the Italian streets, 'devour[s]' grapes 'largely because of their purple smell' or 'trie[s] to lap the gold on the window-stained tomb' (126). The animal – the primeval eye-insects, or indeed still the domesticated cocker spaniel – can 'become' colour.

Such becoming brings 'into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms', as does Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal.[113] Becoming-animal conceptualises 'human-animal relationships based on affinity'; '[i]t concerns alliance' or a '*symbios[i]s*', but retains 'a heavy emphasis on difference.'[114] Virginia's becoming colour likewise relies on an interconnection – the ability to become colour resides 'furled up in us' – and dissimilitude—we must 'rever[t] to the insect stage of our long life' (8). Importantly, the primeval conditions required for becoming colour are reproduced in a picture gallery—such as those in which Vanessa's work was hung, or evidently, the Sickert exhibition, which Virginia visited with Vanessa (who, according to Gillespie, '[i]nstigated' the writing of the pamphlet).[115] Indeed a visit to the exhibition kindles, first, becoming animal – one of the speakers declares 'I became completely and solely an insect—all eye' – and, then, becoming colour: the '[c]olours went spirally through my body' and they 'warmed, thrilled, chafed, burnt, soothed, fed and finally exhausted me' (9). Like the swarming insects in the forest, the speaker's experiences are numerous: a plurality of colours takes her through a number of multisensorial, material sensations. It seems that becoming colour, intimately associated with humans' animality, is, like becoming-animal, always invested with a multiplicity.[116] Ryan highlights the connective nature of becoming-animal by defining it as 'the shared event of becoming different, of becoming entangled with the other', and in fact, as Deleuze and Guattari coined the term, they contended that Woolf 'made all of her life and work a

[113] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, [excerpt from] 'Becoming-Animal', in *The Animals Reader*, pp.37—51 (39).
[114] Deleuze and Guattari, p.37, 39, 37. Becoming-animal was originally conceived to conceptualise 'relations that cannot be defined in terms of kinship, or sameness', but I believe that an evolving understanding of kinship needs exactly what becoming-animal stands for: affinity along with 'multiple differences' (p.37).
[115] Gillespie, p.8; see also p.94. Tellingly, as Gillespie notes, the subtitle of *Walter Sickert—A Conversation*—echoes the titles and content of a number of Vanessa's paintings (including *Street Corner Conversation*, *The Conversation*, and *A Conversation Piece* (pp.172—3).
[116] Deleuze and Guattari, p.39.

passage, a becoming, all kinds of be comings between ages, sexes, elements, and kingdoms.'[117] In the deep, dark jungle of *Walter Sickert* and Flush's dreams, we discover the processes of becoming animal and/or colour are essentially affiliatory and collective.

FEMINIST PRISMATICS

Goldman, too, has noted a connection between *Flush* and *Walter Sickert*; she aligns Flush with other 'lynx-eyed' animals, and identifies the similarity of the animal's gaze with that of the artists and critics in the pamphlet: 'For Poe, Woolf, and Derrida, to have an animal's eye, is to read without reading, to read differently, to read somatically perhaps.'[118] Flush does, indeed, read his surroundings in a more multisensorial way than any other Woolf protagonist: he combines his olfactory and somatic animal sensitivity with the gazing eye of a visual artist. Colour is one of the particularities Flush is attuned to—anthropomorphically so, since dogs actually have dichromatic colour perception, which means they are not colour-blind, but neither can they differentiate green and red, for example.[119] Flush, on the other hand, observes all the colours of the rainbow, as a human eye does. Indeed we can think of him as another pair of 'different spectacles' in Virginia's much-cited image of her and Vanessa having 'the same pair of eyes, only different spectacles'; he, too, relates meaningful moments of feminist prismatics.[120]

Flush is mottled with significant colours: negative scenes are tinted with red and yellow, associated with warning, threat, and aggression, and, in this particular case, Robert and the London patriarchs, whereas other colours are used to signal positive moments. In *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*, Goldman closely analyses the colours in Woolf's essay 'The Sun and the Fish' (1928), suggesting that her manipulation of purple, white, and green may be read as 'a feminist gesture' and an attestation of new feminist prismatics.[121] 'These colours were linked with the militant Women's Social and Political Union in particular and "the cause" in general', Goldman writes, explaining the foundation for the connection between feminism and colour.[122] The colour triad appears consistently in Woolf's oeuvre, *Flush* included. In fact, the colour purple and its associations go through a

[117] Ryan (2013), p.152; Deleuze and Guattari, p.48.
[118] Jane Goldman, 'Chapter 12. *Flush: A Biography* – Speaking, Reading, and Writing with the Companion Species', in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, pp.163—173 (170). The other lynx-eyed animals are Derrida's cat and Edgar Allan Poe's lynx in 'The Purloined Letter' and 'Silence—A Fable'.
[119] András Péter, 'Dog VISION', 2013, <https://dog-vision.com/#Color> [accessed 16.2.2017].
[120] *Letters*, VI, p.158.
[121] Goldman (2001), p.68.
[122] Goldman (2001), p.68.

transformation in the course of the narrative, changing with Flush and his worldview. To begin with purple is associated with Flush's aristocratic origins and superiority, and a sense of English upper-class dignity (he is a lady's dog: he drinks from a purple jar). However, in Italy, purple gains new meanings as it becomes connected with green and, eventually, white. It is linked to Flush's preference for 'the human scene'; Flush is 'all attention' when the company arrive in a village and, like an artist, looks around as if "'taking notes or preparing them."'(123—4) He is 'stirred' into a 'silent rapture', and the image depicting the manner in which beauty 'touche[s] Flush's senses' brings two suffrage colours together: '[b]eauty […] had to be crystallised into a green or violet powder and puffed by some celestial syringe down' the dog's nostrils (124). The synaesthetic image with its heavenly overtone suggests Flush's ecstatic reception of the colours green and violet—he is on his way to freedom, perhaps even peace.

All three suffrage colours frame him in one of the last scenes of the book—one that features, significantly, also in Vanessa's final illustration. Unlike the pompous Flush of London and the purple jar, Flush-turned-Florentine is now the friend of 'many-coloured mongrels' and an old woman, Catterina (148). Flush dozes off next to a ' brown jar of red and yellow flowers'—colours which once sent him off on a rampage are now meshed with brown and shadows; his relations with his enemy Robert are peaceful (148). Above Catterina and Flush stands 'a statue, holding his right arm outsretched, deepen[ing] the shade to violet' (148). In the violet shadow of this protective statue the two knit and doze, as the 'sun burn[s] deliciously through the lily leaves, and through [a] green and white umbrella' (149). Noting the feminist undertones of the colour combination, Goldman suggests an interesting historical connection between the statue in *Flush* and the Little Brown Dog statue in Battersea Park, with its symbolic, feminist history of ideological debates.[123] She writes that the statue 'provide[s] comfort to Flush in just the way the little brown dog fountain statue was meant to function in the politically advanced democratic grove of Latchmere, London.'[124] Goldman, importantly, notes that whilst '[r]ecalling a politically turbulent, class-ridden English life, Flush languishes with female companions in the "violet" shade of Italian public fountain statuary.'[125] Indeed, it is telling that Flush's companion in his late carefree and peaceful life is a likewise elderly woman. The emotional content of the

[123] See Goldman (2001), pp.68—70.
[124] Goldman (2016), p.169.
[125] Goldman (2016), p.169.

scene is also relevant in this respect: it is a moment of contentment, quiet, warmth, and contemporary companionship.[126]

These illustrious Italian scenes must owe much to Virginia and Leonard's road-trip in Italy in spring 1933—Virginia wanted take Vanessa along, but she, though 'deeply touched' and 'overcome by your offer', thought a short trip to Italy would be 'too tantalizing'[127]—but they are also related to the South European scenes Vanessa described to Virginia in her letters, trying to entice her to visit more often and for longer, as well as to her painted work in the 30s. The scenes in fact recall those invoked in the forewords Virginia wrote for Vanessa's exhibitions in 1930 and 1934, which relish in the paintings' visual worlds. In the manuscript version of her 1930 foreword, Virginia asks, 'basking' in Vanessa's vineyard scene and its 'green & blue & reds & yellows', '~~Can we not bathe in it~~', attempting to catch the 'Colour' in a synaesthetic image like Flush's attempts to lap the colour gold or eat a purple smell.[128] If these scenes got her excited, the manuscript also reveals the ideas she struggled to express: the first page grapples with the question of how to talk about Vanessa having seen naked men; throughout, Virginia's literary narratives threaten to overwhelm the draft but are cut back; and the last pages show her frustration at the oft-repeated and crossed-out question of what the 'very strong emotion' is that her sister's paintings 'excite'.[129] Emotions are also at stake in *Flush*, and the dog is as sensitive to the emotions of his human mistress as he is to colours, which are often used in emotional scenes. Since his puppyhood with Miss Mitford, Flush displays 'an even excessive appreciation of human emotions': seeing the wind 'ruffle her white hair' and 'redden' her face 'excite[s] him to gambols whose wildness was half sympathy with her own delight' (10—11). Evidently, in her searches for alternative methods of expressing the variability and messiness of life, both colour and the odd kinship of a companion species struck Virginia as highly suitable due to their simultaneous traction with affiliation and polarity.

Indeed, it was emotional expression, according to Virginia, that made Vanessa 'so satisfying as a painter': '[h]er vision excites a strong emotion', and yet it 'escapes', remaining independent, 'saying something of its own'.[130] Like Flush's mind, which neither the reader nor Elizabeth can finally know, '[o]ur emotion has been given the slip', looking

[126] Nonetheless the moment is fleeting; the purple, green, and white cannot protect Flush from his memories and the narrator speculates that a traumatic recollection of the London ruffians and a phallic, threatening knife wakes him up. Virginia would go on to consider woman's part in *Three Guineas* and *The Years*—began after *Flush*—but the dog biography, too, may be read to have reflected on the position of the underdog.
[127] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, undated, Tuesday, 1933.
[128] NYPL, Berg, 'Pictures by Vanessa Bell', [pp.3—4].
[129] NYPL, Berg, 'Pictures by Vanessa Bell', [pp.6—7].
[130] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.3].

at Vanessa's paintings.[131] Yet neither Virginia's preface to Vanessa's exhibition catalogue nor *Flush* ends with the shock of this unknowability and stubborn autonomy of saying 'its own' thing alone. Flush returns to Elizabeth and her gaze, and in the final paragraph of the foreword, 'somehow our emotion has been returned to us. For emotion there is. The room is charged with it.'[132] In her sister, Virginia recognised someone 'to whom the visible world has given a shock of emotion every day of the week' and who 'share[d]' that shock 'in her language'.[133] Flush, too, is subject to 'the riot of emotions that floo[d his] nerves' every day of his life, and the biography is Virginia's attempt to transmit his emotional experience by his means (20). These images emphasise the power and plurality of emotion, committing both texts to a definite openness in answering the initial question of the 1930 foreword, 'what is that emotion?'[134]

The 1934 foreword likewise employs the becoming imagery of *Flush* and *Walter Sickert*, in which becoming colour is a connecting and collective experience. The foreword describes what goes on in Vanessa's exhibition—one of those primeval forests: 'Not a word sounds and yet the room is full of conversation. […] Nobody moves and yet the room is full of intimate relationships.'[135] The conversers and participants in the 'intimate relationships' are various and entangled: the viewers with each other, the viewers with the colours, and the colours with each other. Indeed, the '[g]reens, blues, reds and purples are here seen making love and war and joining in unexpected combinations of exquisite married bliss.'[136] Anthropomorphising the colours 'give[s] the paintings life and embodiment', as Humm writes, and it demonstrates Virginia's experience of Vanessa's paintings as a 'sensua[l] and emphateti[c] project[ion of] her feelings in a kind of transference.'[137] Colour, once again, is about connection, even the intimacy of 'making love' or 'married bliss', as it is about the polarities of war. As the colours meet, the viewer's mind comes together with the viewed: 'People's minds have split out of their bodies and *become* part of their surroundings.'[138] Virginia again uses becoming as an image of intimate connection and concurrent difference; she flirts with comparisons of 'making love' and yet 'splits' from the body, avoiding a full embrace of picturing physical intimacy.

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[131] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.4].
[132] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.4].
[133] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.4].
[134] NYPL, Berg, 'Pictures by Vanessa Bell', [p.8].
[135] Virginia Woolf, 'Foreword' to *Catalogue of Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell* (London: Alex, Reid & Lefevre, 1934), [p.1].
[136] 'Foreword' (1934), [p.1].
[137] Maggie Humm, 'Chapter 21. Woolf and the Visual', in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, p.300.
[138] 'Foreword' (1934), [p.1]. My emphasis.

This kind of intimacy was, as we have seen, more openly written out in her animal tropes, and indeed, in the freedom of Italy, Flush comes to 'kn[o]w what men can never know—love pure, love simple, love entire; love that brings no train of care in its wake; that has no shame; no remorse' (114). The story of Flush's carefree loving is coated with flowers, a list of subjects in a still-life gone wild: 'To-day the flower is a rose, to-morrow lily; now it is the wild thistle on the moor, now the pouched and portentous orchid of the conservatory.' (114) Flush loves and embraces '[s]o variously, so carelessly' miscellaneous dogs and miscellaneous colour(ings): 'the spotted spaniel […], and the brindled dog and the yellow dog' (114). Bodied intimacy with multicoloured variety comes easily to Flush, to whom 'it was all the same' (114). Flush's becomings reveal Woolf as a willing, if not always able, ally to Haraway's criticism of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal not being interested enough in the earthy, muddy realities of individual wolves.[139] Like Haraway's messy interspecies entanglements, Flush 'doesn't worry over shame.'[140] In *Flush*, a blameless escapade, Virginia unfurls images of embodied connection and becoming colour by exploring needy emotion and intimacy more carelessly than her takes on human psychology dared.

'CONTRASTED AND COMPOUNDED' SMELLS

Turning from human eyes to a canine nose, I will take a sniff at Flush's sense of smell and propose that its earthy, synaesthetic treatment provides a space for alternative ways of reading the world and becoming entangled. Flush's world, of course, is primarily made of smells: everything is smell, not only love and music, but also the visual world—'form and colour', as well as architecture, '[a]re smell' (124). The narrator treats Flush's life-affirming olfactory worldview with respect and enthusiasm, and it is positively associated with authenticity, comprehensiveness, and inclusivity. As stated, Flush's visual sense is extremely acute; however, the visual descriptions are often followed by olfactory passages, which are as vivid, if not even more so. Arriving at Wimpole Street, the narrator states that Flush 'was more astonished by what he smelt than by what he saw'; likewise in Elizabeth's room 'again it was the smell of the room that overpowered him' (19, 20). Smells often metaphorically overwhelm him: they 'floo[d]' over him or 'assaul[t] his nostrils' (20, 28). The most 'imperious' smell of all is love: it comes suddenly 'tearing' down the wind and

[139] Haraway (2008), pp.27—8. Haraway criticised Deleuze and Guattari for their 'horror at the ordinariness of flesh' (p.30).
[140] Ryan (2015), p.96.

'rip[s] across his brain', 'obliterat[ing]' all other smells, 'rous[ing] deeper instincts' and 'stronger emotions' (11—13). But even the most mundane (to the human nose) of scents, such as eau-de-cologne may simultaneously overpower and appear extremely refined and exact to Flush, as explained in the image of a scholar exploring a mouldy mausoleum (20). Virginia employs various devices in attempting to convey Flush's olfactory experiences: often detailed lists flood the reader's eye, or at times exclamatives and punctuation are used to emphasise 'how sun made the stones reek! [...] how acid shade made the stone smell!' (126)

These lists and descriptions reflect the infinitely complex forms smells take in Flush's world. Firstly, smells tend to appear in synergy—his nostrils are 'thrilled' by 'a variety of smells interwoven in subtlest combination' (11). Secondly, the dog's experience of smelling is vastly synaesthetic. Poetic accumulative rhythms and alliterations, such as 'warm whiffs' or 'soups simmering', suggest a musical quality to the scents (19). Furthermore, Flush often reacts to smells in tasty images of eating or devouring, for example the mixture of smells at Wimpole Street makes up 'the general stew' (19). Further still, he also senses tactile smells, considering materials like fabric—crinoline, plush, and so on—or furniture matter, such as 'cedarwood and sandalwood and mahogany' (19). Significantly, Flush finds these synaesthetic feasts filling and inebriating; for example, during his visit to a busy London street, he takes in 'gleaming mounds of pink, purple, yellow, [and] rose', '[a] million airs from China, from Arabia', flashing silk and rolling bombazine, and all manner of movements, which send him to a haze: 'satiated with the multiplicity of his sensations, [Flush] slept, drowsed, dreamt and knew no more' (27).

In another rapturous scene of smelling, Flush is faced with another set of 'swooning smells': 'smells more complex, corrupt, violently contrasted and compounded' (28). This alliterative description draws attention to the complex structures of the smell combinations; they are 'violently contrasted', like colours might be, and yet strongly bound together, as the repetition of the [ko] sound suggests. This impression is reinforced by the dual meaning of the word 'compounded', which can describe making up a composite whole, or intensifying the negative aspects of something.[141] The most interesting word in the phrase may nonetheless be 'corrupt', which summons together the 'bitter', 'fuming, heady' smells, the negative implications of which are soothed by the musical, harmonious alliteration of the whole (28). These scenes foreshadow Woolf's mature preference of somatic seeing and multi-sensory experience, which, as Humm suggests, is exemplified in 'The Moment:

[141] 'compound', *Lexico*, 2020, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/compound> [accessed 6.3.2020].

Summer's Night' (1938), where 'Woolf privileges hybridity over medium and disciplinary specificity.'[142] Flush, swooning for both the putrid and pure, exults in mixing and entangling various sensory impressions and in corrupt, 'contrasted and compounded' forms, demonstrating an appreciation of difference within sameness in very somatic terms.

Flush's involvement with smell is one of wholesome and full-bodied immersion; he becomes part of the mixture. In a moment of imaginative stretching the narrator considers that 'perhaps Shakespeare' could have verbalised—though he did not—Flush's experience of 'the smell of a spaniel mixed with the smell of torches, laurels, incense, banners, wax candles and a garland of rose leaves crushed by a satin heel that has been laid up in camphor' (125). But, as we have learned, his sensations do not become deformed by words—whatever attempts the dog biography makes to describe Flush's world, it constantly acknowledges its own inadequacy. Kendall-Morwick argues that Flush's biographer, 'turning on its head the characterization of animal being as a state of deprivation', 'posits language as a confirmation of the finitude of the human *Umwelt*.'[143] Indeed, *Flush* is symptomatic of Woolf's ambition to stretch the limits of her medium and find alternatives that would not 'exacerbat[e]', to borrow Kendall-Morwick's phrasing, 'humans' sensory impoverishment' or record experience in distorted form.[144] This search necessitates her raids into the realm of silent art, inhabited by her strange kin: the animal, and the sister who was 'as silent as the grave', both of whom, because their 'expressiveness ha[d] no truck with words', could 'go on saying something of [their] own.'[145]

Shakespeare is one of the many authors conjured up to demonstrate the shortcomings of the written medium, which is aligned with Flush's smelling occupation: 'where [Elizabeth] wrote, he snuffled' (124). Ryan notes the viability of smelling as an alternative mode of communication to the dog's 'apparent lack of speech', which is then 'not really a lack at all'.[146] Smelling is evidently also an alternative form of aesthetic organisation and expression like painting, the other silent medium: both issue beauty 'not in words, but in a silent rapture' (124). Virginia's simultaneous admiration of the expressive range of colour and frustration at the fleeting nature of the wordless media—recorded from 'Blue and Green' to the foreword for Vanessa's exhibition in which emotion escapes—are likewise trackable in *Flush*: because '[t]he greatest poets in the world' do not have the nose for depicting smell, its 'infinite gradations' remain 'unrecorded' (124).

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[142] Humm (2016), p.301.
[143] Kendall-Morwick, p.520.
[144] Kendall-Morwick, p.520.
[145] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.3].
[146] Ryan (2016), p.112.

This silence does not mean that there is no conversation—as we have seen, 'the room is full of' it[147]—and this gives us once more an opportunity to trace a sororal subversive language within the seeming silence. Goldman analyses the invocation of the Philomela and Procne myth in the 1930 foreword, in which Virginia proclaims that not going to see her sister's pictures is like 'shut[ting] the window when the nightingale is singing.'[148] Considering the embedded allusions Goldman proposes that Virginia sees Vanessa as '"a painter's painter", practising significant form, but also suggests her art conceals a hidden language akin to the secret communications between Philomela and Procne' and thus finds 'a specifically feminist eloquence at work beneath the public silence of her sister's painting.'[149] Following this, I interpret silence as something more than literal voicelessness, a shorthand for an alternative language: a communication between sisters, or an animal's language—a nightingale's or a dog's. The publicly wordless languages may express some private sensations and emotions that the written word cannot. In this light, *Flush* must be acknowledged as an olfactory-somatic part of Virginia's aesthetic project, as well as a part of her project of relating to familiar otherness—projects which were consistently intimately entangled and not least because of their search for authentic expressions of the fullness of lived experience, including that 'something of its own' and the 'sober truth' of the other.[150]

STRANGE PERSPECTIVES

Before bringing this chapter to a close, I want to delve into the radical, reformatory possibilities of the animality of Flush's perspective. I propose that the dog's point-of-view is not only handled textually in the book but that its significance becomes highlighted in the four illustrations Vanessa provided. Gillespie remains the only critic who has extensively commented on these illustrations, which demonstrates her claim that both Woolf and Bell scholars tend to ignore them as trivial.[151] She reads them as a product of Vanessa's 'desire to respond visually to Virginia's work' and as such forming 'another nexus in the relationship between the sisters and their art media.'[152] I agree that both, the sisters' relationship and the relationship between their arts, are at stake, though I wonder at Gillespie's giving the last word on the illustrations to Jean Guiguet, who finds them unsatisfying, unsuccessful and

[147] 'Foreword' (1934), [p.1].
[148] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.2].
[149] Goldman (2001), p.160; 163.
[150] 'Foreword' (1930), [p.3]; 'Foreword' (1934), [p.1].
[151] Gillespie, p.116.
[152] Gillespie, p.116.

straining.[153] Nonetheless, I will refer to many of Gillespie's insights in my commentary on the illustrations, whilst approaching them as manifestations of the subjective nature of experience and the particularities of the canine perspective, which reiterate Virginia's textual moments of defamiliarisation and produce varying degrees of physical and mental strangeness and intimacy, demonstrating the vitality of acknowledging alien perspectives within the closest of kinships.

Hovanec recognises such writing of an animal mind as 'an opportunity to develop some of [Woolf's] signature modernist techniques—a mutable point of view, defamiliarizing imagery, and delayed decoding.'[154] Woolf's animal perspectives are modernist experimentations with the technique of defamiliarisation, which was the defining feature of Tolstoy's short-story 'Kholstomer' that satirised human conventions by taking the perspective of an outsider, an animal.[155] Citing Viktor Shklovsky, Hovanec underlines that the unfamiliarity experienced by the readers arises from the fact that the point-of-view is that of an animal – in Tolstoy's case, a horse – and argues that Woolf, in her attempt to be zoologically specific and 'consonant with the scientific representations' of the animals' experience, demonstrates awareness of the potential aesthetic contributions of non-human perspectives.[156] Of Woolf's narratives employing animal points-of-view, 'Kew Gardens', with its small snail in the huge flower-bed, is probably the most radical one, but *Flush*, as a novel, is the most extensive and possibly the most mature.

Questions about the subjectivity of experience and different perspectives were also considered through animal subjects by modernist visual artists, and have especially been linked to cubist experiments—which were familiar to Vanessa already in the 1910s. According to Baker, '[p]erhaps the most striking example in the art of the early twentieth century of an attempt to think outside the secure perspectives of the human' is the expressionist painter Franz Marc's short essay 'How Does a Horse See the World?'[157] Marc suggests that the mystery of how a horse, an eagle, a doe or a dog sees the world should be the painters' object; instead of treating animals as props in the landscape, we should 'in die Seele des Tieres zu versenken, um dessen Bildkreis zu erraten.'[158] The verb 'versenken' has strong links to mysticism, and can mean 'sinking into', 'plunging', or even 'enwrapping'—in this particular context I would in fact propose 'becoming' in the style of Deleuze and

[153] Gillespie, p.148.
[154] Hovanec, p.257.
[155] Hovanec, p.257.
[156] Hovanec, p.257.
[157] Baker, p.285.
[158] Franz Marc, *Briefe, Aufzeichnungen and Aphorismen*, Vol.1 (Berlin: Cassirer, 1920), p.121. 'sink into the soul of the animal, to guess its image circle.' (my trans.)

Guattari. Marc propounds that for the doe, 'the landscape must be "doe-like".'[159] In this sense, the 'artistic logic of Picasso, Kandinsky, Delaunay, Burljick, etc., is perfect', because these cubist artists 'project *their* inner world.'[160] A hypothetical picture representing the animal's view of the world would require the artist to be 'infinitely more subtle', which is why painting an animal 'not as I see it but how it exists' 'remains an unsolved problem.'[161]

At the end of his essay, Marc asks, 'Who is able to paint the existence of a dog as Picasso paints the existence of a cubic shape?'[162] Although the task is impossible, I want to emphasise the reasons for attempting it. Elsewhere Marc describes his aims in painting animals: '[w]ir müssen von nun an verlernen, die Tiere und Pflanzen auf uns zu beziehen und unsre Beziehungen zu ihnen in der Kunst darzustellen.'[163] The repetition of 'zu' gets lost in translation, but as a signifier of English equivalents 'to', 'towards', or 'in', it directs the German reader's attention to themes of relating and relationships, even entanglement. Vanessa, an early admirer of Picasso and one of the first British artists to experiment with Cubism, was evidently also interested in the expressive possibilities of various perspectives, and, keeping in mind Marc's prompt that artists should heed the peculiarities of an animal's subjective experience, it comes as no surprise that her illustrations for *Flush* accentuate the dog's point-of-view and partake in her sister's related radical (though comparatively belated) textual project.

A dog's field of vision is 240° – they literally see more on the horizontal axis than we do – but Flush also demonstrates an aptitude to see and vary his viewpoint vertically. Sometimes his visual abilities are super-canine; Humm aligns him with a visual artist: 'In Florence, Flush witnesses street politics from above, the typical point of view of the modernist urban photographer', which, one might add, he shares with Elizabeth.[164] Photography, practiced by Virginia and Vanessa alike, can be considered a modernist visual art *par excellence*, since it had 'maximised panoramic and elevated urban vantage points of view'.[165] However, more commonly than from this aerial perspective, Flush observes his surroundings from a lower ground level. In her discussion of Flush's ability to read 'differently [...] somatically perhaps', Goldman speculates on the possibility of Flush

[159] Franz Marc, 'How Does a Horse See the World?', trans. by Ernest Mundt and Peter Selz, in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. by Herschel Chipp (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), p.179.
[160] Marc (1969), p.179.
[161] Marc (1969), p.179.
[162] Marc (1969), p.179.
[163] Marc (1920), p.123. 'From now on, we have to learn to relate the animals and plants to us and to represent our relationship to them in art.' (my trans.) The verb 'darstellen' means representing, but also showing, personating and posing—again catching aspects of 'becoming' the translation cannot.
[164] Humm (2010), p.225.
[165] Humm (2010), p.226.

reading, only his view of the page is obstructed: 'Flush could not read what she was writing an inch or two above his head.' (51)[166] Perhaps, then, there is something delimiting in Flush's perspective: 'Flush can read images; he can read humans', he could even, as Goldman continues, 'read human writing', but his 'station at [Elizabeth's] feet' blocks his access (50).[167] Also adopting Haraway's companion species theory, Goldman refers to Flush's ability to read his literate woman companion—indeed, 'he knew just as well as if he could read every word, how strangely his mistress was agitated' (51). On the level of the "material-semiotic node of knotted beings", to borrow Haraway, Flush can read Elizabeth, but when it comes to reading writing, his 'station' obstructs his view.[168] This parallels the visual and emotional extraordinariness and the disconnect from the written word Virginia associated with Vanessa, but this set-up, importantly, approaches the juxtaposition from the point-of-view of someone other than the writer.

Interestingly, a similar low point-of-view can also be found in Vanessa's work, most famously in her experimental, cubist piece *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece* (1914):

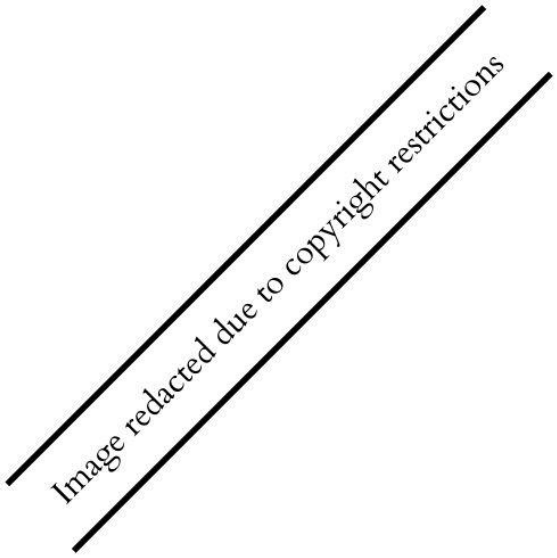

Figure 15. Vanessa Bell, *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece* (1914).

Humm notes the relevance of Vanessa's variable perspectives in relation to *Flush*. Versatility of perspectives can be seen in her 'use of formal points of view in her flower paintings' and, as Humm writes, especially 'her depiction of objects against the receding perspective of a

[166] Goldman (2016), p. 170.
[167] Goldman (2016), p.172.
[168] Quoted in Goldman (2016), p.172.

room, is matched in Woolf's visual arrangements.'[169] Vanessa used perspective to play with both movement and contrasting sizes, and certainly *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece* was composed towards such ends. The 2017 Vanessa Bell exhibition acknowledged the importance of the unusual vantage point from below, presenting the piece as Bell's 'most experimental foray into the genre of still life.'[170] The audio guide further emphasised the painting's links to the avant-garde by referring to Vanessa's visit to Picasso's studio with Gertrude Stein. The 'peculiar angle from below', curator Sarah Milroy continues, 'gives the painting a strange monumentality, despite its modest size. A subject that is normally light and airy becomes somehow sculptural.'[171]

The painting is indeed surprisingly small and framed in plain wood, which highlights the monumentality even more: the frame seems too small and tight for the painting that wants to grow out of it. The corner of the mantelpiece appears sharp and protruding and the strong colour contrasts add to the gravity. The angularity of the shapes at the front, in particular the prominent red, is juxtaposed with light shades, feminine pinks and varying shapes further up the still-life.[172] Rather like Flush gazing up to Elizabeth's 'brilliant' flower arrangement, which is associated with the danger Robert poses (61—2), the low vantage-point makes the subject seem threatening and overpowering—an effect further emphasised by the contrast of yellows and blacks at the curve in the upper part of the painting. Yet, I would argue, even more than an impression of threat, the viewer is struck by the unfamiliarity: supposedly a flower-pot, the subject is barely recognisable as boxes, cylinders, and blobs of colour. Indeed the subject-matter of the still-life may be the perspective itself, and its ability to make usual things appear almost completely alien to us. Vanessa asserts that the world is strange from this low angle, and by having painted it, she also affirms, like her sister in 'Kew Gardens', that it is potentially formally innovative and worth depicting. This, I feel, should be the point of departure as we turn to her illustrations for the dog biography narrated from a low vantage-point.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE FLUSH?

Vanessa's line drawings are interested in the dog's perspective and thus offer quite a striking contrast to the other illustrations, which are mostly photographic: Pinka; an

[169] Humm (2010), p.226.
[170] museum label for Vanessa Bell, *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece* (1914), 'Vanessa Bell (1879—1961)'.
[171] audio guide for Vanessa Bell, *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece* (1914), 'Vanessa Bell (1879—1961)'.
[172] The colour scheme is similar to *Abstract Painting* (1914), which emphasises the picture's non-representational elements.

unsigned 19th-century engraving of a cottage (Flush's birthplace); photographs of Miss Mitford, Robert Browning, and two of Mrs Browning. The photographs are provided by the National Portrait Gallery, and yet Virginia, interestingly, refused to be painted for the Gallery in 1934. Thus, rather than aligning herself with the three famous authors, Virginia's refusal to become one of the authoritative faces in the Gallery affiliates her with Vanessa's illustrations: loose in style, imaginative and changing in perspective. The sisters' correspondence reveals with how much detail and seriousness Virginia approached her illustrator.[173] A letter by Vanessa discloses that she was paid '3 times as much as usual for [her] end papers'; in the same letter she writes that 'having no lettering was a great relief', expressing her pleasure at the purely visual nature of the commission, contrasting them with her jacket-work.[174]

The first illustration is titled *Miss Mitford takes Flush for a walk*, and it shows the spaniel with his first mistress in countryside surroundings. Gillespie describes the general gist of the illustrations: 'Bell alters the point of view in her designs correspondingly [to Woolf's perspectival changes]', and suggests that the first drawing suits 'the traditional biographic style' of the book's beginning.[175] Indeed, the dog's point-of-view is adopted only when 'Miss Mitford brings Flush as a gift to Elizabeth', but I believe a closer scrutiny of the drawing already shows a consideration of the canine perspective.[176]

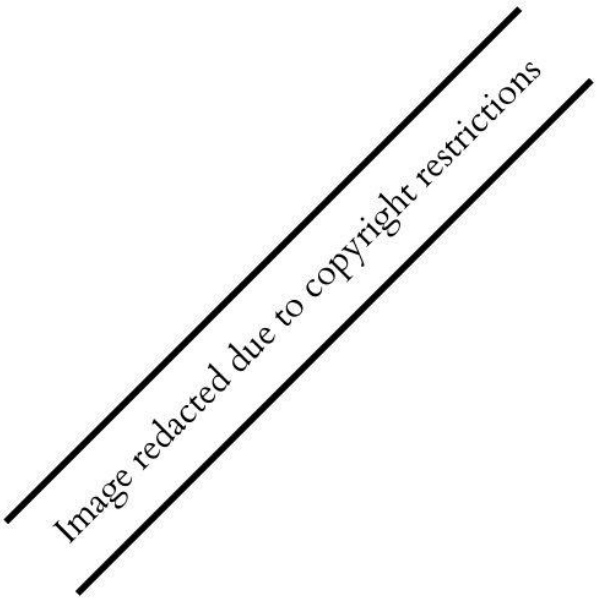

Figure 16. Vanessa Bell, *Miss Mitford takes Flush for a walk* (1933).

[173] 'We should like if possible to have them bound in on separate pages in the large sized edition. The size of the page in the large sized edition works out roughly at 8 ½ inches by 5 ½ inches.' (12 June 1933, quoted in Humm [2010], p.225)
[174] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, undated, Tuesday, 1933.
[175] Gillespie, p.145; 143.
[176] Gillespie, p.143.

To begin with, the drawing, as a product of Vanessa's (and Virginia's, since it depicts a scene from the book) imagination, is necessarily fictitious and as such not a very conventional illustration in a biography. In contrast to the 19th-century engraving preceding and the photograph of Miss Mitford following the drawing, Vanessa's style is funny, personal, and even comical, emphasising the scene's imaginary nature. Miss Mitford is portrayed as a benevolent, properly-dressed woman, looking into the direction of their walk, whereas the scampering Flush turns his head to look outside the picture, suggesting a smell or a sound that has attracted his attention, and it is this curiosity the viewer feels sympathetic towards. The position of Miss Mitford's hands and the relatively bold lines imply a connection between the two, and, more specifically, control and a chain. Flush's front paws are in the air and the toes of his back paws appear prominent and detailed, suggesting movement, activity, and excitement.

The pair's surroundings are pleasantly natural, and in her typical way Vanessa has drawn flower-like shapes at the front, which, along with the rising horizontal line and the shaky, vivacious lines drawn with a quick hand, convey the many smells the wind carries to the dog's nose. The trees behind the walking couple bend around the figure of Miss Mitford, framing her head and forming a composition that evokes the wind and structural harmony. It is a happy picture, if we fix our eyes on the content face of Miss Mitford, but if contrasting the two figures, an impression of tension rises; next to Miss Mitford's round, soft, rather featureless face and her stable, legless (visibly, that is) body, Flush seems the point of excitement and action, with boldly drawn legs and his pointed muzzle. Indeed, the illustration accompanies the first textual moments of introducing the reader to Flush's predisposition for smells—the source of significant aesthetic content and the defining feature of Flush's point-of-view. Vanessa's Flush, with his turned head and bouncy feet, is the dog that may flash off 'like a fish drawn in a rush' and forget 'his mistress' and 'all human kind' (11). Thus, although kindly towards his mistress, the illustration shows us a creature strongly stimulated by his way of experiencing the world and a muzzle that looks beyond the picture in which a conventional woman, a writer, stands in the middle.

The second illustration accompanies the second chapter, also titled 'The Back Bedroom', and, like *Still Life on Corner of a Mantelpiece*, it is seen from a low angle. Gillespie notes the move from an exterior to interior space and identifies Flush as the point of focalisation: 'The dog no longer appears in the illustration; rather, we see what he sees.'[177] Here we have then, literally, Vanessa looking at the world through Flush's eyes.

[177] Gillespie, p.145.

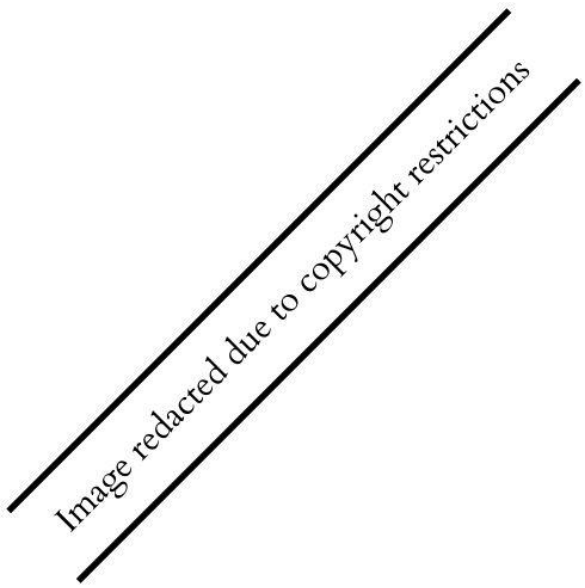

Figure 17. Vanessa Bell, *The back bedroom* (1933).

Gillespie also acknowledges the changes Bell has made to the room '[t]o suit her design', but, as Gillespie concludes, 'text and design both communicate enclosure.'[178] The viewer looks into Elizabeth's room, which is meaningfully dubbed the 'back bedroom', through an open door—it seems that Flush, assuming he is the on-looker, is outside the room (as are Bell's initials, just outside the door) and yet directly oriented towards it. The heavy floral patterns in the walls and the carpet imply the Victorian oppression both outside and inside the back bedroom. The room is crammed and full; as Gillespie writes, the details of Bell's design 'crowd into the small space'.[179] The bed, with its heavy-looking linen, stands in the middle of the room, surrounded by tables, the wardrobe, a bookshelf and the marble busts, and sunk in it, we see Elizabeth. Compressed into the space like this, the woman is part of the room or its furniture—framed first by the pillows supporting her, then the furniture around her, and finally the door-frame. Flush sees the room as a conflicted space: the curly, circular patterns give a soft, feminine impression to it, but looking at the patterns is also somehow giddying and suffocating. Bell's ideas of Victorian interiors are reproduced in the patterned tapestries and heavy plush, which tire and oppress the eye—in contrast to her airier Omega designs, which also utilised circular and flowery imagery. Even the door, implying the possibility of being shut in, adds to the visual impression of the strain of penetrating into the room and to Elizabeth. In addition, the low perspective accords the room a lot depth, making it cave-like. The living figure of Elizabeth and the vase of flowers

[178] Gillespie, p.145.
[179] Gillespie, p.145.

in the room, watched over by the dead men's busts hint at the Victorian women's dangerous complicity in their own oppression, because of which, veiled and muffled as she appears, it is extremely difficult for the woman artist to exit the room. Finally, the perspective strongly implies that the room is the direction the viewer – Flush – is going to, even though as an outsider, he can see it for what it is.

The third drawing is a return to the dog's point-of-view after three historical portrait illustrations. As Gillespie notes, it 'contrasts markedly with' *The back bedroom*, reflecting the changes that have occurred in Flush and Elizabeth's lives.[180] The low angle and the space occupied by the viewer in *At Casa Guidi* again suggest Flush's perspective; he is, once more, looking at Elizabeth in her room, which is strikingly different from her 'back bedroom'. Contrasting the two, Gillespie notes the room's bareness, Elizabeth's gaze having moved from the interior space to the exterior, and the fact that she has turned her back to the viewer. However, the drawing's implications about the freedom of movement may be scrutinised more. Throughout the chapter 'Italy', which the drawing refers to, the reader is made aware of how much the mistress and dog move, especially on their own. Elizabeth, no longer bedbound, now looks towards life, to the outside, as indicated by her gaze through the huge, decorous windows, which open to a view of Florence—recognisable by the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore and the hills. The book in Elizabeth's hands indicates her artistic activities. The typical curving Bellesque forms in the sofa and the curtains, next to the steady lines and square shapes of the window, buildings, and tiles, comprise a balanced picture, with formal variation. Elizabeth is perhaps the first object to capture the viewer's eye, but directly from her, the gaze moves on into the city and fixes on to the horizon. Flush, on the other hand, stands at some distance from Elizabeth, but she remains a central part of his life's horizon. The tiles – where, by the way, we detect Bell's initials and where Flush occasionally snoozes – emphasise the space left between the two protagonists, but they also imply the possibility of movement.

[180] Gillespie, p.145.

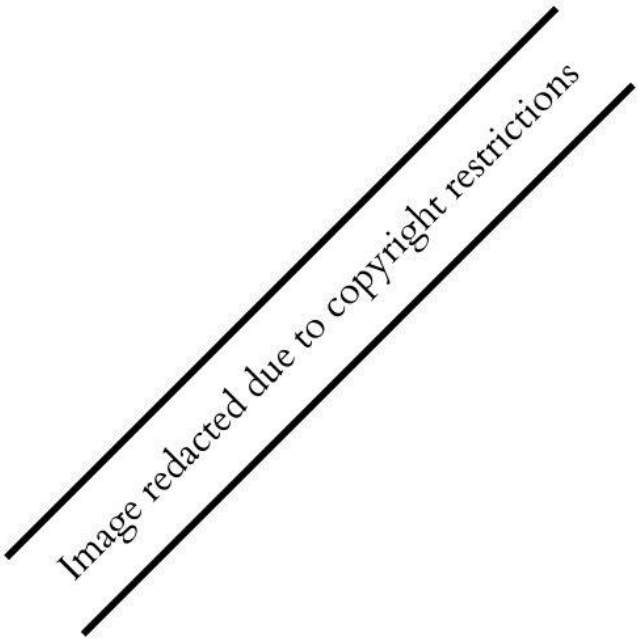

Figure 18. Vanessa Bell, *At Casa Guidi* (1933).

This illustration, the last one from Flush's perspective, links to the freedoms that Flush and Elizabeth found in Italy: they are free to go their own ways and the relationship between them exists harmoniously and allowing variable, differing perspectives.

The last drawing, titled with a direct quotation from the text, *"So she knitted and he dozed."*, is also the book's last illustration. Thus, in the last drawing, the picture and text are brought closer together than in any of the previous illustrations. It depicts Flush sleeping at Catterina's feet, by her fruit stand, under a shade. Catterina might indeed be knitting.

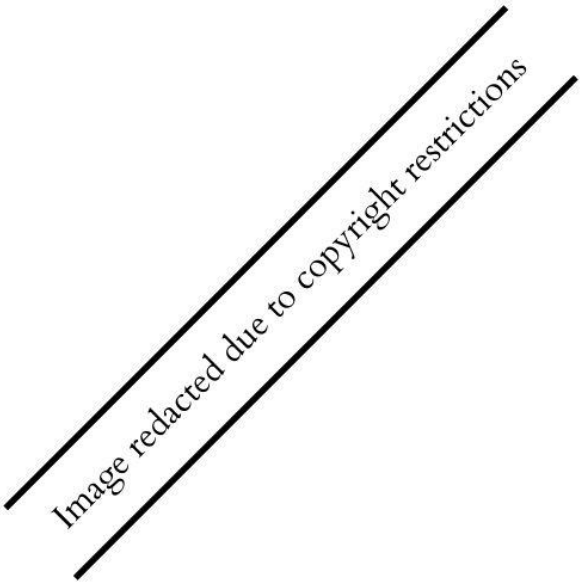

Figure 19. Vanessa Bell, *"So she knitted and he dozed."* (1933).

The drawings have progressed circularly: here, like in the first one, Flush is portrayed from an outsider's point-of-view and he appears in the company of a woman other than Elizabeth. Flush is now more democratic and communal: his narrative and life no longer centre on Elizabeth. Catterina's clothes recall Miss Mitford; in addition, his companion is an older woman like Miss Mitford and a lower-class woman like Lily Wilson.

In the two drawings at the heart of his biography Flush looks at Elizabeth – emphasising the significance of their gaze – and yet, rather interestingly, the two are never depicted together in Virginia's book. Painted portraits of the two do exist, and these have appeared in later editions of *Flush*, but originally, Virginia seems to have chosen not to use them, as Vanessa chose not to supply a double portrait—which she did, however, in her and Duncan Grant's *Famous Women Dinner Service* (1932—4).

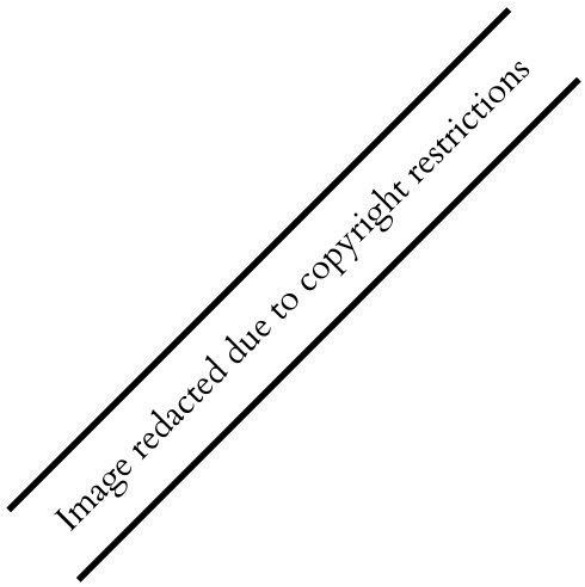

Figure 20. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Flush* (1932-4)

While all the other forty-nine women are depicted alone, Vanessa decided on a double portrait of mistress and dog to represent Barrett Browning, which signals the extent to which she, too, associated the two.[181] Indeed, in both sisters' portrayals of Flush and Elizabeth, although they are 'made in the same mould', we detect varying degrees of separation and togetherness, and as Vanessa's final illustration for *Flush* implies, the ending note of their coevolutionary story is finally one of amicable detachment (24).

[181] Claudia Tobin, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Flush', in *From Omega to Charleston: The Art of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant 1910—1934*, ed. by Matthew Travers (London: Piano Nobile Publications, 2018), p.130.

"So she knitted and he dozed." shows a peaceful and warm scene; life is compact and content. Most of the objects are centred around Catterina and Flush, on whom life is closing in gradually and who has found harmony under the big round sunshade, which frames and watches over the pair. Both characters appear to have their eyes closed, suggesting both peace and death. Shadows are also intimated by the dense lines about the fruit-stand. Flush's sleep imparts the same message of unknowability as the text it accompanies: again, we see him from the outside, and we may assume he is dreaming, but we cannot know the content thereof. As at the end of a film, we zoom out of the protagonist. Considering the design of Vanessa's drawing, Gillespie notes two interesting points: Vanessa has chosen 'to make this scene visible through a window' and has foregrounded 'a vase of lilies on the ledge', suggesting a link between the drawn flowers and Virginia's 'lily leaves', through which '[t]he sun burnt deliciously' (149).[182] Vanessa painted a number of still-lifes of lilies, and tended to highlight the triangular shape of the petals, whereas here the flowers have deliberately oval blooms, looking like arum lilies, which Virginia associated with grief and death.[183] The pole and curtain-like shapes framing the left side do indeed recall a window, through which someone is looking at the peaceful pair. The last person shown looking through a window is Elizabeth, but since the illustration follows the scene of Elizabeth having just looked 'through [Flush] as if he were not there', the implied on-looker is unlikely to be her (147). Catterina and Flush have also closed their eyes, but someone's eyes are open, since someone is looking at them.[184] The framing and flowers, placed at the front of the illustration, suggest the identity of the on-looker – the artist – and the lens through which she observes the scene. There is a touch of grief, perhaps, but also an emphasis of the raison d'être of still-lifes and portraits: immortalising beauty and stilling everyday life—the recommended perspective for the viewer and the reader of *Flush*.

In her 'Introduction' to *Flush*, Kate Flint declares that Woolf's little dog 'looks forwards to much more recent developments [...] about species and rights, [...] race and feminism'.[185] Indeed, by attempting to answer the question as to what it is like to be Flush? – or someone who relates to the world differently from oneself – *Flush* does prefigure ideas that emerged and became central to animal studies since Thomas Nagel's essay 'What Is It

[182] Gillespie, p.145.
[183] Elisa Kay Sparks, 'Twists of the Lily: Floral Ambivalence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Georgia O'Keeffe', in *Virginia Woolf and Her Female Contemporaries*, ed. by Julie Vandivere and Megan Hicks (Clemson University Press, 2016), pp.36—46 (41).
[184] The set-up and atmosphere foreshadow the portrait Vanessa painted of Virginia in 1934, in which she appears peaceful but somewhat wary and posing next to a pot of lilies.
[185] Kate Flint, 'Introduction' to Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.xii—xliv (xliii).

Like to Be a Bat?'. Nagel finds the subjectivity of all experience 'essentially connected with a single point of view', and due to the 'highly specific' character of subjective experience, our endeavours in imagining the experience of an alien form of life necessarily fail, since we are 'restricted to the resources of [our] own mind[s]', and our vocabulary is inadequate to describe 'the enormous amount of variation and complexity'.[186] This might explain some of the frustration readers like Guiguet have felt towards the imaginative effort demanded by '"the distance between"' Elizabeth and Flush both in the illustrations and the text.[187] Nagel admits that at present, imagination is the best and only tool in trying to understand an other's unfamiliar experience, but, as he argues, the manner in which we can take up the point-of-view of an other is rough and partial and thus the 'conception will also be rough or partial.'[188] Hence the conclusions of the animal studies critics, like Hovanec: in her thought experiment of what it is like to be Flush, 'at some point, Woolf reaches a kernel of obscurity at the heart of animal experience'—or the experience of a coevolutionary creature.[189] Even the experience of a sister must remain at a distance.

Hovanec summarises *Flush* as a work of defamiliarisation: '*Flush*, a book that exemplifies the creative and ethical possibilities of perspectivism, is also a book about perspectivism's limits, about the final impossibility of shedding human constructs and entering into the dog's symbolic world.'[190] Hovanec's words may well be applied to any subjective experience—*Flush* does well in capturing the subjectivity of an other and the nuances of his point-of-view, but, for the reasons Nagel highlights, it must fail. Ryan and others have emphasised the importance of *Flush*'s success as a story of coevolution, with which I concur, and it is also due recognition for its ethical audacity. Its grounding of experience in the mundane and muddy world of a dog is an ethical gesture, as is the unfeigned wish of its author, in Quentin Bell's words, 'to know what her dog was feeling [...] to know what everyone was feeling'.[191] Taking on a perspective that is new, strange, and low manifests a compassionate imagination that questions the prioritising of certain points-of-view, probes the connections between different ways of seeing and values any subjectivity, even when it is alien.

FOR THE PACK

[186] Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review*, 4 (1974), pp.437—440.
[187] Quoted in Gillespie, p.148.
[188] Nagel, p.442, fn8.
[189] Hovanec, p.266.
[190] Hovanec, p.266.
[191] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Volume Two: Mrs Woolf 1912—1941* (London: Hogarth Press, 1972), p.175.

Thus, *Flush*, its reformation of the sisters' familial scripts and its unfolding understanding of kinship reach for a space that accommodates multiplicity. Flush is legion: he is a dog whose 'flesh was veined with human passions', his temporary transformation into Pan is similarly boundary-crossing, and, as Kendall-Morwick notes, his Bildung is completed 'in the multispecies community of Florence' (127, 24).[192] In the course of the narrative, 'the fact of companion-species entanglements', to use Kendall-Morwick's phrase, is a transformative force, which may be linked, again, to becoming-animal, especially if we follow Ryan's prompt to 'expand upon and complicate the domestic, material-semiotic entanglements between' Flush and Elizabeth.[193] Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari write that 'becoming and multiplicity are the same thing', since 'packs, or multiplicities, continually transform themselves into each other.'[194] Ryan specifies that becoming-animal involves a "fascination for the pack, for multiplicity", which leads towards 'intensely interwoven multiplicitious agencies.'[195] Such a fascination is reflected in Flush's becomings and the shared being experienced by agencies both animal and human in *Flush*. Remarkably, though these comings together of opposing categories are meaningful manifestations of Virginia's blurred lines, *Flush* does not promote a view of kinship as fusion. However strong the connection between him and his mistress is, their difference is also of essence, and only by this difference can Virginia construct and maintain the pivotal scenes of interspecies gazing and kissing. Kin-making, within the terms set by *Flush*, entails both self-containment and propinquity, and is in this sense 'for the pack', preserving plurality.

Thanks to its diverse nature as a human-animal narrative, *Flush* demonstrates Virginia's appreciation of hybrid forms like no other work of hers—it imagines shapes which are polymorphous, celebrates multisensoriality, collectivity and change, and does not view corruption as deformity. The encounters between genres and media in the book, like the other categories that it rewrites, do not rely on opposition but are best imagined side by side. Relationality is at the heart of *Flush*'s conception of both literary form and interpersonal relationships; things 'continually transform themselves into each other', and different forms are connected to one another by their becoming something else. Jeanne Dubino cites the marine biologist Charles Veron in her exploration of bispecies affiliations in *Flush* and their myriad shades: "everything is always on its way to becoming something

[192] Kendall-Morwick, p.522.
[193] Kendall-Morwick, p.522; Ryan (2013), p.153.
[194] Deleuze and Guattari, p.46.
[195] Ryan (2013), p.154.

else."[196] *Flush* revels in multisensorial variety and suggests that corruption, or the transformation of material through contact with others, is a positive force, a unifier that is not afraid of crossing boundaries.

The dog biography leaves the reader with a sense of a polymorphous relationship, which evolves and brings us to a final analogy from animal theory. Haraway attests that 'companion species' is 'less a category than a pointer to an ongoing "becoming with"'.[197] Ryan perceives a likeness between Haraway's parallel image and Deleuze and Guattari's '"rhizome" concept, which emphasises horizontal growth rather than [...] hierarchical verticality', and indeed, Haraway's imagined 'kin networks' look 'more like a trellis or an esplanade than a tree. You can't tell up from down, and everything seems to go sidewise.'[198] Kinship in *Flush* moves likewise horizontally, echoing the trellis of companions in *The Waves* and foreshadowing its coming in the familial context of *The Years*. *Flush* and the 'peculiar intimacy' it depicts evidence a working law of the mother, and it is vital that *Flush* does this by revisiting Virginia and Vanessa's shared personal herstory, which gains an amicable ending. The sister relationship, having consistently relied on an alliance or conspiracy, and developed through coevolution, now finds it also has room for difference and distance, and so comes to fruition in the central bond portrayed in *Flush*. Only by playfully embracing the wordless otherness of Flush does Virginia produce the possibility of significant sororal otherness, her most evolved and radical vision of kinship.

[196] Jeanne Dubino, 'The Bispecies Environment, Coevolution, and *Flush*', in *Contradictory Woolf*, pp.150—157 (152).
[197] Haraway (2008), p.16.
[198] Ryan (2015), p.66; Haraway (2003), p.9.

INCONCLUSIONS

In April 1941, after her sister Virginia was reported missing and presumed dead, Vanessa started receiving condolences. She received over 50, now held at the Keep, classified as 'Letters of condolence to Vanessa+Clive Bell on Virginia Woolf's death'.[1] Excluding one or two exceptions, though, the letters are addressed to Vanessa. Sympathisers near and far knew that she and Leonard were the ones to feel for. Helen Anrep was convinced that out of a sense of duty to her husband and her sister, '[s]he wouldn't have done it in her right mind'; Vita concurred, writing '[s]he cannot have been responsible to bring this upon you both.'[2]

Those nearest to the sisters and who had known them the longest revert to the same kind of imagery in their letters to Vanessa. Her old friend Snow writes about losing 'ones beloved Companion'; Nelly Cecil declares that 'nothing can replace' 'a sister companion'.[3] The sisters' companionship left an impression on outsiders' minds—'When I first knew you one never thought or spoke of you apart', Nelly recalls.[4] The friends also bear witness to Vanessa's constant care of Virginia; Violet Dickinson, for example, testifies that '[t]he whole of your life you always looked after her and warded off so many dangers; and comforted her'.[5] Nonetheless, despite numerous beautifully-worded letters – and some less so – Vanessa's grief for her sister is written of as something particular and private: Margery Fry, recalling the death of her brother Roger, knows that 'no one can help'; Adrian 'had no idea'; and Vita concludes her note appropriately, distantly and sympathetically: 'I know what you meant to one another. It is absurd to talk of sympathy.'[6]

Importantly, Vita remembers a conversation that reminds us that the sisters' care was mutual: 'I did tell her what you said about the comfort she had been to you over Julian, and I have never seen her look more pleased and even surprised. [...] your message gave her the keenest pleasure'.[7] This recollection records Virginia's sisterly doubts about her role in Vanessa's life—she wanted to be reassured that she had been good and important to her. That Vanessa had been meaningful to her was never in doubt, not even in the state she wrote her suicide note to her sister: 'If I could I would tell you what you and the children

[1] University of Sussex, The Keep, University of Sussex Special Collections, Monks House Papers, Letters of condolence to Vanessa+Clive Bell on Virginia Woolf's death, SxMs56/1/219. All the cited letters of condolence are found here.
[2] Helen Anrep to VB, undated; Vita Sackville-West [henceforth VSW] to VB, 31 March 19141.
[3] Margery Snowden to VB, 4 May 19141; Nelly Cecil to VB, 20 April 1941.
[4] Nelly Cecil to VB, 20 April 1941.
[5] Violet Dickinson to VB, 5 March [misdated] 1941.
[6] Margery Fry to VB, 1 April 1941; Adrian Stephen to VB, 4 April 1941; VSW to VB, 31 March 1941.
[7] VSW to VB, 31 March 1941.

have meant to me. I think you know.'[8] We may recall the 'you'll understand' from Vanessa's letter about Mrs Ramsay, the explicit statement of the implicit understanding between the sisters.[9] This amity is once more paired with inexpressibility of what Vanessa meant for Virginia.

Among the letters of condolence, a note 'To Vanessa Bell' from a Marcie Collett stands out, because it is from a virtual stranger, an American fan of Virginia's.[10] She writes of her own feeling for her 'suddenly quenched' 'lodestar', but since the letter is addressed to Vanessa, her words open to another interpretation:

> Surely it must have meant <u>something</u> [...] to know that for one person [...] you were the symbol of all she admired in the art she was learning to practise, and as an individual; and that she would have given anything she possessed to have heard you speak or to have seen you?

If we take 'you' to refer to Vanessa and 'she' to Virginia, if only because the interpretative possibility is there, we suddenly have a very loaded description of the intense admiration as well as the struggles of hearing and seeing others we have been following in this study. Furthermore, Collett's insistence on meaning and her image of the lodestar resonate with Virginia's presumably last short-story, 'The Symbol', in which "[t]he mountain [...] is a symbol ..."[11] 'But of what?', asks the female protagonist, writing a letter to her elder sister.[12] The signifying power of the symbol is inconclusive – the draft-version of the story was called 'Inconclusions' – but the ending affirms the inconclusiveness with the sister: 'And she added. "Love to the children," and then her pet name.'[13]

CONFIGURING SISTERHOOD

So let us draw some inconclusions. As surely as Virginia and Vanessa's companionship was unique and irreplaceable, their relationship comprised much more than their mutual care. This study has demonstrated 'a wide range', to recall Segdwick's words, 'of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping' in Virginia's active textual

[8] Letters, *VI*, p.485.
[9] See Introduction, p.7.
[10] Marcie Collett to VB, 12 April 1941.
[11] Virginia Woolf, 'The Symbol', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, pp.288—290 (288).
[12] 'The Symbol', p.288.
[13] 'The Symbol', p.290.

sistering of Vanessa.[14] Chapter 1 witnessed the textual foundation of Virginia's representations of the sister relationship in forms that depended on the sister pair's parity as well as on the sister's silence, which allowed imagining the sister as 'more of me'.[15] Parity and silence remain central to the figurations of Chapter 4, but by *Flush*, Virginia can picture the strangeness of silence as a productive alternative to words alongside coevolutionary intimacy. But the road there is rocky, as the preceding chapters showed. In particular Chapter 2 explored the textual realities of sororal violence, but moments of oppressive silencing occur throughout Chapters 1—3, and they are often tinged with excessive intimacy. These are crucial aspects of Virginia's sistering of Vanessa: her fictionalised dissemination, production and enactment of violent and erotic sororal impulses were probably mostly contained to her writing, but, I have argued, these were not any less tangible or influential aspects of the sister relationship. Following Mitchell's attestation that eroticism and violence between siblings are close 'in their construction', I have tried to unveil how intimately these drives were composed and reiterated in Virginia's sororally inspired work.[16]

From the biographical narrative that my chapters follow, Virginia and Vanessa's relationship emerges as a bond that is, in a true Butlerian sense, both enduring and breakable. Already in 'Phyllis and Rosamond' the sisters consider the threat (and the inevitability) of heterosexual marriage, and beginning with 'Reminiscences', my primary texts evidence that Vanessa's marriage was a central event Virginia always returned to. To Virginia, this moment in their herstory had signified rupturing of their sisterly parity, and by her writerly repetition, she confirmed the rupture as definitive of their sisterhood. Also in consequence, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, her two novels trying to rework the marriage plot, featured women's breakable intimacy alongside and in opposition to the heteropatriarchal marriage. Virginia's wish to model her alternative configurations of kinship on her relationship with Vanessa was always informed, and in her early writings strongly coloured by, her understanding and experience of Vanessa's marriage as rupturing of their sisterhood.

In Virginia's Vanessa-inspired writing, then, we have observed the creation and realignment of family scripts in action: since her sisterly writing departs from Oedipal structures, we can talk of 're-authoring', but it is as important to keep in mind that these texts also produce the sister relationship as a thing of its own. The overall progression of

[14] Quoted in Helt and Detloff, p.2; Sedgwick, p.8.
[15] Mitchell, p.65.
[16] Mitchell, p.34.

the authored family script is lateral: from daughters-at-home evolve, with some difficulty, women on their own *and* women among themselves—*Flush* in fact replicates this developmental arch seen in the other primary texts. One central aspect of textual sistering is indeed such maintaining and production of shared sororal herstory, which Virginia implemented across genres, blurring generic boundaries. The autobiographical resonance of her fiction explored in this thesis emphasises the fact that even in the production of a real sister relationship, fictionality and the potential for fantasy are vital elements. Virginia's employment of fictionality is complex and two-edged: via its imaginative and generative force, she can both create sororal spaces that liberate and support herself, her sister and women in general, and act in ways that oppress the same women. Sisterly fiction, like sisterly lives, are assuredly ambivalent, simultaneously loving and violent.

One of the questions I set myself in the Introduction had to do with language. What might a reconfigured vocabulary of kinship look like? I began with a text in which sisters talk among themselves—and fall silent. It is noteworthy that strictly speaking, the amount of talk did not increase as I moved through the primary texts: in *The Voyage Out*, the women speak but it is rarely reported to us, in *Night and Day* the women try to speak and find themselves unable to do so, and Flush of course is 'dumb'. Yet the sororal features throughout as the space that generates the possibility of an alternative language and imaginary to describe women's relationships. Both Virginia and her characters repeatedly equip masculine images to describe feminine or sisterly phenomena, but these do not last. Here, too, it is helpful to evoke Irigaray's speculation about women's language: in 'When Our Lips Speak Together', her narrator declares that she has 'never known how to count' but that '[i]n their calculations, we make two': 'Really two? [...] An odd sort of two. And yet not one. Especially not one. Let's leave *one* to them: their oneness, with its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism'.[17] Irigaray's 'one' seems to me – rather than the pronominal 'one' both Virginia and Vanessa used in order to avoid 'I' – to be like the 'I' in *A Room of One's Own*: 'a straight dark bar', boring due to its 'dominance' and 'aridity'.[18] The masculine 'one' and 'I' are inadequate even as the basis of sororal language, which could perhaps do with the word between 'self' and 'other', but certainly, being essentially serial, needs to go beyond 'one' and 'two'. Logically therefore, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, the most promising vocabulary of sisterhood is borrowed from discourses that are strange: first in the otherness (in the lack of a better word and concept) of non-human space and then of animality. It is vital, though, that Katharine's space, besides being strange, is simultaneously

[17] Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.207.
[18] *A Room of One's Own*, p.75, 76.

expansive, and that Flush's animality, though unknowable, is also coevolutionary and convivial. Virginia Woolf's vocabulary of kinship, it turns out, is not just about sameness: in its mature form, it is also about accommodating the stranger.

SISTERS, SISTERS

Kinship that is quintessentially open to difference within sameness – in other words, pluralistic – is also key to the discoveries of characterisation and portrayal that Virginia made in her attempts to fictionally, biographically and autobiografictionally portray her sister. The conscious portraits of 'Reminiscences' and Katharine Hilbery respond very differently to the fundamental issues of depicting the sister's difference. For Virginia, as '[a] student of character', to cite Vanessa's 1910 letter, the discoveries of *Night and Day* represent a turning-point.[19] Parallel to the conventional marriage plot runs the lesson of characterisation that concludes with an imperative of allowing privacy, distance, even non-representation. A series of questionably representative portraits of her sister brought Virginia to her modernist understanding of character that produced *Jacob's Room* and the following novels, which 'adore' and 'embrace' 'unknown figures'.[20]

One possible way of expanding this research would indeed be analysing a similar series of portraits from Vanessa's oeuvre, namely the faceless portraits – we often forget that she painted many – she made of her sister around 1911—12, when Virginia was living *her* marriage plot. For although I have focused on the ways Virginia's work sistered Vanessa, Vanessa of course was also performing their kinship when she left her sister featureless—or rubbed her facial features out. Here, too, sistering implies a touch of violence—a reminder that none of the discussed representations of sisters or sisterly figures was without it, but that Virginia's work consistently demonstrated that even the most loving plurality always contains violence. Indeed if there is an ethical imperative valid for my work or any work discussing sameness and difference, it is one of representing both the productivity and the turbulence of both parity and diversity.

We have, significantly, seen that in its most evolved form, Virginia's configuration of lateral kinship found an imaginary of familial otherness for envisioning differentiation among lateral kin as something positive—you cannot, after all, gaze at and kiss yourself. Yet *Flush* is certainly not the conclusion for creating and discovering a vocabulary for the expression of sororal experience. But, judging from the final scene of *The Years*, Virginia's

[19] NYPL, Berg, VB to VW, 25 June 1910.
[20] Virginia Woolf, 'An Unwritten Novel', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, pp.112—121 (121).

family chronicle, which once again rendered the sororal herstory in light of the 'Present Day', we can say that she did conclude her reconfigurations of family on the lateral axis. In *The Years*, aspects of Vanessa feature in the emotionally reserved Maggie Pargiter, the elder in a pair of sisters who parallel the lives of the bigger Pargiter family.[21] Diana Swanson describes the Pargiter siblings' struggles out of the Oedipal familial structures as 'aim[ing] to change the social relation of women and men from that of daughter and father to that of sister and brother.'[22] Indeed—and let us not forget about the women-among-themselves: before the siblings Eleanor and Morris can look to their new sunrise of 'beauty, simplicity and peace', we follow the sisters Maggie and Sara Pargiter, looking at each other, the Virginia-like Sara 'balanc[ing] herself uncertainly against her sister', and helped by her into the final scene.[23] A small but purposeful gesture of Sara's, 'turning to her sister', is choreographically repeated by Delia a page later, and the echo suggests a seriality in such 'turning to her sister', underlining the significance of gestural repetition in kinship-production.[24] As the closing of *The Years* purports, the paradigmatic shift from the patriarchal order to an unfixed horizontality in social life is a widely-applicable and valuable regime change, the possibilities and complications of which are best demonstrated by figures of primary laterality, siblings. For my part, I do not want to lose sight of the sororal moments of being – if indeed the relationship 'has been too deep for "scenes"' – that enabled this open vision where Virginia arrived in the arm of the character(s) inspired by Vanessa and her reservations.[25]

This thesis has analysed the ways in which Virginia's writing sistered Vanessa by managing and constructing their difference within their sameness. We have seen that textual performance of sisterhood relies on the concept of seriality, as suggested by Mitchell, and its inherent multiplicity. Besides, the sister figure is tremendously generative. Its expansive imaginative power is illustrated in Virginia's image of the ever-filling bowl, which we usually recall from the opening of the 'Sketch of the Past': 'If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills', she writes before describing the memory of 'the purest ecstasy' on which her 'bowl without a doubt stands upon'.[26] At this point, it will seem habitual of me to note that this symbol, too, is a sororal one: years before, after having visited Vanessa in France in 1927, Virginia wrote to her: 'Ever since I left

[21] Lee, p.118.
[22] Diana Swanson, 'An Antigone Complex? The Political Psychology of *The Years* and *Three Guineas*', *Woolf Studies Annual* (1997), p.42.
[23] Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, ed. by Hermione Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.413, 411.
[24] *The Years*, p.411, 412.
[25] 'Sketch of the Past', p.146.
[26] 'Sketch of the Past', pp.78—9.

Cassis I have thought of you as a bowl of golden water which brims but never overflows.'[27] As ever, Virginia is describing Vanessa's usefulness—but more prolific is the 'golden water', if we find it possible to imagine the sister as the filler rather than the vessel. Such an image would be even more than Irigaray's companion, who 'remain[s] in flux, never congealing or solidifying'—fluid, yes, but also perpetually increasing.[28] It would be productive to research other authors' sistering vocabularies and imaginaries: I trust that this thesis has done something to open up the definitions and to suggest possible interdisciplinary applications of sistering. Evidently, sisters sister—but so do non-sisters. I hope that my demonstrative pen has succeeded in exhibiting the uniqueness of this sister relationship and the distinctness of the texts that made some of it, and in signalling more generally how we sister in art, as well as how art theorises about the strangest and most intimate of relationships.

[27] Letters, *III*, p.363.
[28] Irigaray, 'Speak Together', p.215.

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